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HERBS for STRESS & ANXIETY

How to Make and Use Herbal Remedies to Strengthen the Nervous System

Rosemary Gladstar, author of
Rosemary Gladstar's Medicinal Herbs: A Beginner's Guide

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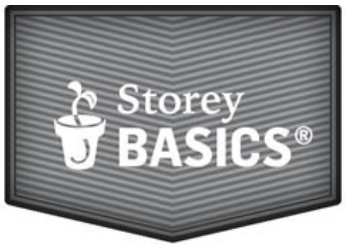

HERBS FOR STRESS & ANXIETY

How to Make and Use Herbal Remedies to Strengthen the Nervous System

Rosemary Gladstar

Storey Publishing

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Share Your Experience!

My life centers around 500 acres on a mountaintop in the northeastern part of Vermont. There are endless helping hands that make it all possible: the gardens, the trails, the small orchard, the beehives, the woodlands, the wildflower meadows, and an office that hums continuously, a hive of happy activity. There are so many people who have helped over the years, but a few people who have always been there, helping with their hearts as well as their hands. This book is dedicated to them: Robert Chartier, Jason Colvard, Melanie and Jeff Carpenter, Jennifer Temenski, Micki Visten, Amy Goodman Kiefer, Donna Bryant Winston, Katie Pickens, and Matthias and Andrea Reisen.

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Introduction

Do you recall the last time you felt really peaceful? When you felt truly, profoundly calm and content? When you woke up smiling and the world smiled back? Can you say that you have ample time for social events, get everything done in a day that you wanted to, and feel like your “to do” list is under control? Do you sleep deeply and soundly, so that waking up is a joy, not a chore?

If you’re like most of us, these feelings are pleasant but fleeting experiences — or even distant memories. Far too many of us live in a state of recurrent or chronic stress and anxiety. We’re overscheduled with work and family obligations, oversaturated with information, overwhelmed with social and personal expectations — in short, overloaded. The natural response to that overload is stress and anxiety. And for many of us, chronic stress and anxiety lead down a precipitous path to depletion, chronic fatigue, illness, and depression.

People have always experienced stress and anxiety. These important biological responses are warning signals designed to alert us of possible danger — that “fight or flight” response so essential to survival. However, we have only to look at the staggering number of nervous system disorders in our population today to sense the magnitude of the problem of living under a constant onslaught of stress and anxiety.

Modern medicine offers a variety of treatments for the symptoms of excessive stress and anxiety, which range from depression and insomnia to muscle tension, cardiac irregularities, and gastrointestinal distress. However, it places

little emphasis on the need to build a strong and resilient nervous system. It may not always be possible to make our lives or the world around us less stressful, but we can create greater peace and inner calm by changing how we respond to stress. Herbs, exercise, healthy eating habits, meditation, and cultivating healthy relationships can all fortify our nervous system and help correct any underlying imbalances. As gentle, effective therapies, these practices are well suited to relieving the symptoms of stress and anxiety and building a more resilient, adaptable nervous system. And when a serious, chronic disorder necessitates pharmaceutical intervention, these natural therapies can play an important adjunct role in helping restore balance and harmony.

This book outlines the simple steps I've found to be helpful in relieving stress not only in my own life, but in the lives of hundreds of other people as well. Stress is a fact of life, neither good nor bad; it's how we respond to it that matters. And how we respond to stress is vitally dependent on the health and resiliency of our nervous system. Greater joy is the goal!

CHAPTER ONE

Understanding the Nervous System

Stress can be anything from the lash of a whip to a passionate kiss.

— Hans Selye

The nervous system (NS) is our link to our environment. It has three basic functions: to receive, to interpret, and to respond. Within the limited paradigm of modern Western science, nervous system function involves only our physical being. We have countless sensory neurons that allow us to experience our external environment and monitor our internal environment. Then there are the 12 billion or so cells that constitute our brain, the central computer of the body.

That alone would make the nervous system the most important system of our body. It is what provides integration and coordination to our lives. It allows us to see, feel, touch, act, and react. To the degree that it is impaired, the quality, tone, color, and richness of life are diminished.

But the nervous system serves in a far greater capacity than just the physical quarterback of our body. It is that place where life itself, conscious self-awareness, attaches to the physical vehicle and converts the "puppet" into the "puppeteer." It is the interface where we can dream, think abstractly, create, and receive intuitive impressions. It is our primary connection to Universal Consciousness, or the divine in all of us.

The Final Frontier?

Western scientific culture has shed great light on the workings of the human entity and the disease processes that affect it. However, many frontiers in medicine continue to baffle the most ardent of researchers. As we discover more answers we are confronted with even more difficult questions.

The continuing exploration of the biological sciences provides us with a gross understanding of the human body and how it interacts with its environment. This progress has carried us to the exploration of ever more subtle areas of human metabolism. In these more elusive areas the psychologist, the physicist, the microbiologist, the physiologist, the biochemist, and others must combine their thinking to push back the boundaries of our understanding. The foremost physicists of the world are now adding mystics and metaphysicians to their think tanks because particle physics has revealed that, no matter how much you dissect and reduce something, you cannot get to an understanding of the whole by learning only about its tangible physical parts.

Interpreting the Signals

This, in part, is why the nervous system is such an exciting aspect of humankind. We cannot understand consciousness by dissecting a brain, or how logical, rational thought occurs, or, even more baffling, how creative ideas spontaneously form in our minds.

Though it can be demonstrated which autonomic nerves control which involuntary body functions, how neurochemical transmitters function and which sites they target, and what part of the brain controls these processes, can anyone explain where the original awareness occurs that understands the need to send the message in the first place? And how does this awareness transmit its desires or needs to the physical brain so the impulses can be sent?

We don't even really know what pain is, or why similar impulses can be interpreted as either pain or ecstasy. Nor can we define and explain emotions and feelings, where they originate, and the effects they have on our systems.

Why does the heart keep beating and the breath continue to flow without our "conscious" intervention? And what causes them to eventually stop these functions, likewise without our apparent conscious intervention?

Asking the Right Questions

As much as we have learned about the nervous system, we are only scratching the surface. There comes a point where deductive and inductive reasoning and dissection arrive at an impasse. Without including the idea of a higher consciousness or higher order of the universe in their theoretical constructs, right-brain scientists are completely stymied at giving answers to what many of us consider the *real* questions about life, how it works, and what its purpose may be.

With these thoughts in mind, it is important with the nervous system, perhaps more so than with any other system of the body, to address health and lack thereof from more than just a perspective of physical symptoms and treatments. Allopathic (conventional) medicine, however appropriate for certain circumstances, treats NS disease primarily with drugs that interfere with or block the system's transmission and interpretation of impulses, or by surgical removal of unhealthy tissue. Considering how limited our knowledge in this field is, along with its irreversible nature, surgery, while necessary at

times, should always be a last resort, after every other option has been explored.

Treating the Nervous System

The proprioceptive aspect of the nerves, the sensory receptors that respond to stimuli, provides feedback to the brain and consciousness about vital body information. If we are suffering pain or distress, it is a warning to us of imbalance or danger. Such a warning is only the *symptom*, not the *originating cause*. If the smoke detector in your house goes off, the solution isn't to "deaden" it with a hammer. Wouldn't you be better advised to go look for a fire somewhere?

To continue the analogy further, it is often appropriate to shut off the alarm and stop the noise while searching for the source of the smoke. Allopathic medication often functions beautifully to alleviate acute pain. Unfortunately, for many, when the immediate pain subsides we forget to continue to "search for the fire."

Using Natural Therapies

The approach presented in this book is to use tried-and-true natural therapies to strengthen and build a healthy nervous system. These holistic treatments can be used in conjunction with conventional allopathic treatments to augment healing at all levels of life: physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual. In

the great circle of holistic healing, all systems — herbs, natural therapies, allopathic medicine, shamanic healing practices, massage, counseling, and so on — are part of the whole and should be used when appropriate.

The healthier the nervous system is, the better equipped it is to provide sensory input and motor response that facilitate optimum quality in our lives. Herbs and natural therapies play a vital role in the health and well-being of the nervous system. Not only are herbs full of concentrated nutrients that are important both nutritionally and medicinally, but herbs also help us to form a direct link with our intuition and higher intelligence.

Far more than just "green matter," herbs have an inherent ability to channel life energy and to connect with those places in us that are "disconnected" and in need of healing. Herbs contain chemicals that have no apparent function for the life processes of the plant. However, these very chemicals have a direct and positive influence on the human body. Is there some divine plan at work here? Perhaps it is true that humankind's oldest system of medicine offers a form of healing that transcends the physical and connects us directly with a higher consciousness.

Stress in the Modern World

Svevo Brooks, author of *The Art of Good Living*, pinned down one of the Western world's largest problems when he observed, "As the pace of life quickens, we more deeply need calm, uninterrupted moments for the renewal they impart to our spirit. Leisurely walks, afternoon naps, the opportunity to stop and inhale the fragrance of a flower — these small interludes, once commonplace, are increasingly rare." Taking time for ourselves can do wonders for this most modern of problems.

Reaping the Benefits

There are numerous physical ways that herbs benefit the nervous system. Because they serve as a source of nutrients, energy, and vitality for the entire body, herbs benefit the whole body while directly influencing the nervous system. There are many excellent herbs and herbal formulas used for relieving stress, anxiety, depression, pain, and mental tension. But unlike drug therapy, herbs don't target one area of the body, but rather influence the entire matrix of our body, mind, and spirit. For instance, drinking a warm cup of chamomile tea or immersing yourself in a warm, soothing herbal bath after a stressful day at work is a simple and rewarding way to relax not just your nervous system but your entire being. Though herbs are generally not as effective or as fast-acting as allopathic medicine in dealing with acute pain, they can help

relieve and soothe pain by toning and strengthening the nervous system, rather than blocking or deadening nerve response.

Using herbs and natural therapies on a regular basis helps maintain a healthy, strong nervous system. In this way, herbs serve as preventive "medicine" — truly the best medicine of all.

Ancient Wisdom

The wise words of an ancient physician spoken in 1200 B.C. still apply: "First the word, then the plant, lastly the knife."

CHAPTER TWO

Natural Remedies for Stress and Anxiety

The mind-body connection is fraught with controversy and mystery. How do physical experiences affect the mind, and how do mental experiences influence the body? No one really knows for sure, but we do know that an intricate link between body, mind, and spirit exists.

Whatever our philosophy of life, the nervous system is our primary connection to our world. That part of us that can't be measured or quantified, that part that understands these words and makes rich associations from them, that part that can transcend physical boundaries through the creative thought process — all this is encompassed within the nervous system. The nervous system is our instrument of creation, and we alone get to decide what kind of music we wish to play, and what dance we wish to dance.

Until recently, the majority of Western scientists were unwilling to recognize the connections between the physical, spiritual, and mental worlds. These forces were seen as separate and were treated separately. But today, in the face of a host of modern research and because of the episodic number of nervous system and depression-related disorders, people everywhere are turning to the natural world to heal themselves from the inside out: physically, spiritually, and mentally.

This chapter contains information on and remedies for common nervous system ailments. Though the emphasis is on herbal remedies, there are a host of complementary treatments and lifestyle changes that can benefit the nervous system (see **chapter 3**). Massage and various body therapies, counseling, yoga and exercise, hydrotherapy, light therapy, flower essences, healthy food and good nutrition, and

allopathic medication, when appropriate, can all be beneficial when treating the nervous system.

When you abuse or neglect your nervous system, the music of life turns into a cacophony of sound, the colors fade and run, and your joy and zest for life drain away into indifference. If you treat your nervous system like the sensitive instrument it is, however, it will play back the finest music to enrich your being. Keep it tuned and healthy, feed it well, and protect it from overuse and exploitation, and your reward will be a life of exquisite quality.

Anxiety, Stress, and Panic Attacks

We've all felt anxious at some point. Talking in front of a group of people, a first date, a car coming at you on your side of the highway — these are all reasons for anxiety. Occasional apprehension and anxiety are normal and sometimes the sanest response to a situation; frequent and incapacitating feelings of anxiety are not. The physical symptoms of anxiety include accelerated heartbeat, rapid breathing, restlessness, and difficulty concentrating. Living in a constant state of anxiety is a sign of major NS stress and should be attended to immediately.

Panic attacks almost always begin with anxiety and progress to extreme, uncontrollable fear, often agoraphobic in nature. The fear frequently stems from unknown causes. Panic attacks may be a sane reaction to life in an insane world, the

body's attempt to sound a loud, clear alarm (though sometimes they may also be triggered by an allergic response). Panic signals the flight-or-fight response, which can prove lifesaving for a limited period of time. Unfortunately, panic attacks often do more harm than good to the people experiencing them, eroding their confidence, leaving them shaken and scared, and often with feelings of inadequacy and fear of recurrence.

Panic attacks tend to be preceded by periods of stress, insomnia, poor dietary habits, or overuse of stimulants and/or drugs. It is essential when addressing a panic attack to seek out the reason behind it and work from there, correcting the underlying problem.

What to Do

In anxiety, what you eat is as important as what you don't eat. Follow the dietary guidelines for NS health (see **here**). Avoid stimulants and foods that irritate and deplete the nervous system, such as those that contain caffeine, high levels of sugar, or chemical preservatives, food colorings, or other unnatural substances. (Negative reactions to chemical additives can be the underlying cause of panic attacks and anxiety.) Use nervine tonics and sedatives with kava, oats, lemon balm, California poppy, skullcap, or valerian. Kava in particular is especially helpful for those who experience anxiety and panic attacks. Drink three to four cups of relaxing tea a day. If you're feeling particularly stressed, take valerian tincture every hour until the feeling subsides.

Flower essences (see **here**) are excellent for relieving feelings of anxiety. If you find yourself feeling anxious, carry

the flower essence appropriate for your particular problem with you. Use it at the first sign of anxiety. For panic attacks, keep a bottle of Rescue Remedy on hand at all times.

Often high levels of noise or sudden movement agitate the sensation of fear and uncertainty. Though it's not always possible to control noise in the world, make your home or a room in the house a quiet safe haven, a place where you can retreat when you begin to feel stressed.

Watch for symptoms of anxiousness in children and treat them with the same remedies and therapies you would use for adults, but adjust the dosages accordingly. (See my book *Rosemary Gladstar's Herbal Remedies for Children's Health* for instructions on using herbs for children.)

Hops Tincture

This tincture is an excellent remedy for nerve stress and debility.

- 2 parts hops
- 1 part passionflower
- 1 part skullcap
- Brandy or vodka (80 proof)

1. Place the herbs in a wide-mouth jar. Add enough brandy or vodka to completely cover the herbs by 2–3 inches. Cover the jar tightly and place in a warm (about 85°F), shaded area.
2. Let sit for 4–6 weeks, shaking occasionally to prevent the herbs from settling on the bottom. Strain and rebottle for use. Take ½–1 teaspoon 3 times a day.

Melissa Tea

Melissa, or lemon balm, is a wonderfully relaxing yet gently stimulating herb. It increases energy in the system by helping to release energy blocks and stress.

- 3 parts lemon balm
- 1 part chamomile
- 1 part hawthorn (berries, blossoms, and leaves)
- 1 part lemon verbena
- 1 part St. John's wort

Combine the herbs. Following the directions **here**, prepare as an infusion. Drink at least 2–3 cups daily, or as needed.

Other Recommendations for Panic Attacks

From the treatments in both this section and the section on depression (see the next page), choose a few suggestions that seem best suited for your situation. Because panic attacks often evolve from unconscious fears that are especially challenging to understand, it is often helpful to seek a counselor who is able to guide you on this journey. The best, most effective therapy I've found is Jungian Gestalt dream

work and/or soul retrieval work. Plant spirit medicine, a shamanic herbal practice taught by several well-known herbalists, works by connecting the spirit of the plant with the spirit or life force of the individual and is very effective for these types of situations. There are several excellent books on the subject, including *Plant Spirit Medicine* by Eliot Cowan, *Plant Spirit Healing* by Pam Montgomery, and *The Secret Teachings of Plants* by Stephen Harrod Buhner.

Chamomile Tisane

A relaxing, tasty evening drink, chamomile tisane gently soothes irritated nerve endings and eases away the day's tension. Chamomile is a good source of tryptophan and helps relieve anxiety and tension.

- 4 parts chamomile
- 2 parts lemon balm
- 1 part hawthorn (berries, blossoms, and leaves)
- 1 part skullcap

Combine the herbs. Following the directions **here**, prepare as an infusion. Drink as much and as often as needed.

Milky Oats Tea

This is a very soothing nervine tea, perfect for infants and children to help soothe the cares of the day.

- 2 parts oats (milky green tops)
- 1 part California poppy flowers and/or seeds
- 1 part chamomile

Combine the herbs. Following the directions **here**, prepare as an infusion. Drink as much and as often as needed.

Depression

Depression is characterized by extreme sadness, a sense of hopelessness, and despair. It is caused by a variety of "lack factors," including lack of sleep, lack of nutrients, lack of light, and lack of love. Adrenal exhaustion, cold and damp conditions in the body, and hormonal and chemical imbalances can also contribute to depression. Occasional depression is normal, a factor of life's ups and downs. But when depression begins to settle in and becomes long term, it can become a debilitating illness that affects the nervous system and our quality of life.

What to Do

Sometimes depression is simply caused by a series of very sad, life-challenging or life-threatening events. Like the smoke detector, depression is the symptom, not the cause, an indicator that things are awry. Fortunately, there are many treatments that can help alleviate depression.

Embrace life and love. The best thing we can do for ourselves during times of depression is to embrace ourselves, like parents embracing and loving their child. See if you can embrace yourself in the same way. Create love in your life: Find every reason you can to love yourself and everyone else. Generally, people who love others are loved by others. It's a good trait to cultivate. Obviously, it's harder to cultivate these feelings of self-love and appreciation of others when you're depressed. So practice this when you're feeling good. And get outdoors as often as you can, whether by gardening, hiking, sailing, or whatever appeals to you. It is essential to connect with nature during times of great depression.

Build and strengthen the nervous system so it can serve as the marvelous receptor and distributor of energy that it is. Follow all of the suggestions in chapter 3 that are appropriate to your situation. Concentrate on the herbs that are indicated for depression and sadness: St. John's wort, lemon balm, hawthorn, oats, and lavender. Drink three cups daily of **High Calcium Tea** or **Nerve Formula for Depression**.

Eat a supportive, healthy diet. Be certain that you are eating a nutrient-dense diet, and avoid foods that agitate or deplete the

nervous system. Sugar, for example, interferes with calcium absorption and irritates nerve endings. Caffeine can overstimulate the adrenal glands and endocrine system and exacerbate depression. Concentrate instead on foods that enhance and strengthen the nervous system, such as those that are rich in calcium (like dark green leafy vegetables), high-quality protein, and B vitamins. Essential fatty acids can also be of assistance and are often lacking in the diets of people who suffer depression. Consider adding fish oil and/or flaxseed, borage seed, or evening primrose oil to your daily diet; the recommended amount would be around 1,500 mg daily (three 500-mg capsules).

Bask in the sun or supplement with vitamin D. Mild cases of depression have been alleviated simply by adding sufficient vitamin D (the "sunshine supplement") to the diet. SAD (seasonal affective disorder) is a depressive state caused by lack of full-spectrum light; it's most common in the winter months in northern climates, when sunlight is limited. Adding light therapy and vitamin D supplementation is sometimes all that's needed to lift the spirits and "bring sunshine" back into your life.

Use flower essences; they are strongly indicated for depression and go straight to the issues, even when you're uncertain what the issue or underlying cause is. If you can find a flower essence practitioner in your area, make an appointment for a consultation, or use one of the excellent books that guide you, step-by-step, through how to select the appropriate flower essence. See **here** for a list of flower essences most often recommended for NS disorders.

Take baths of lavender, roses, and oats. If you have a garden, collect roses and borage flowers and add them to the bath. This isn't a treatment only for women; men will benefit from it just as much. Herbal bathing can be soothing and uplifting to a weary, depressed spirit. You might even consider installing an outdoor tub in your garden. It's hard to remain depressed while soaking in a flower-strewn tub surrounded by plants in the garden. However short, this respite from the cares of the world is a welcome relief.

Incorporate different forms of massage into your routine. Massage and bodywork can reach deep, helping the cells release tension and hidden memories that depress or sadden you. Treating yourself from the outside in often helps heal the deeper problem or issues surrounding depression. Remember, depression itself is often not an illness but a symptom.

Listen to your dreams. Often, it is in dreams that the answers come. Our primal consciousness speaks to us in the dark shadows of the night. If you're lucky enough to have a dream therapist, someone trained in Jungian Gestalt dream work, you might consider doing therapy with him or her. It's amazing work that often cuts directly to the underlying issues.

Nerve Formula for Depression

This is one of my favorite formulas for depression and grief. You can adjust the herbs in whatever proportions work best for you, and sweeten with honey to taste.

- 1 part hawthorn (berries, flowers, and leaves)
- 1 part lemon balm
- 1 part oats (milky green tops)
- 1 part St. John's wort

Mix the herbs. Following the directions **here**, prepare as an infusion. Drink 3–4 cups daily, or as often as needed.

Headache

Headaches are considered one of the most common nervous system disorders in the United States, with more than half a billion dollars spent yearly on headache medication. Headaches can result from a number of different problems, including low blood sugar, constipation, toxicity of the blood, allergies, lack of sleep, eye strain, mental stress, and emotional tension. In rare cases headaches can signal deeper problems, such as brain tumors, but most often headaches are the body's

complaint against the overtaxed, overstressed body, mind, and spirit.

Though there are hundreds of drugs promising instant headache cures, the cause of the headache has to be corrected before the problem can be solved. Allopathic medications — that is, pharmaceutical drugs — can be a quick fix and are recommended when the pain is severe, but often once the pain is suppressed, the deeper issues are ignored and the headache returns, sometimes with a vengeance.

Except for migraines, headaches basically fall into two categories: vascular headaches, which are caused by the dilation of the blood vessels in the head, and tension headaches, which are caused by the constriction or tension of the muscles in the scalp, neck, and head.

Tincture Formula for Headaches

- 2 parts feverfew
- 1 part California poppy (leaves, flowers, and seeds)
- ½ part lavender

Prepare the herbs as a tincture, following the instructions **here**. Take ½–1 teaspoon, diluted in a small amount of warm water, every 30–45 minutes until the headache subsides.

Tea Formula for Headaches

- 3 parts chamomile
- 3 parts lemon balm
- 1 part passionflower
- 1 part skullcap

Combine the herbs. Following the directions **here**, prepare as an infusion. Drink ½ cup every hour until the symptoms subside.

ABOVE: *Passionflower*

Treating Vascular Headaches

Vascular headaches are generally the result of too much cold food in the diet and an overly acidic condition in the body. Foods such as ice cream, cold liquids, alcohol, and sweets can agitate the vascular type of headache.

Quickly alkalize the diet with salty, contractive foods such as umeboshi plums (available in natural foods and Asian grocery stores), brined cured olives, and a strong alkalizing tea

blend (any bitter herb blend will work). If you have Swedish bitters or, better yet, Urban Moonshine bitters on hand, you can use them to treat a vascular headache as well; they alkalize the system and neutralize excess acid in the digestive tract. Vascular headaches respond to proper treatment within 30 to 60 minutes.

Alkalizing Herb Blend for Vascular Headaches

- 3 parts dandelion root
- 2 parts burdock root
- 1 part yellow dock root
- Skullcap or valerian tincture (optional)

Decoct the roots as instructed **here**. Drink ¼ cup of tea every 30 minutes until the symptoms subside. Add ¼ teaspoon skullcap tincture or valerian tincture to each cup of tea for best effect.

Treating Tension Headaches

Tension headaches are usually the result of stress, tension, heat, lack of fluids or food, low blood sugar, salty foods, or mental strain. The next time you get a headache, try to identify the foods you ate or the activity you engaged in prior to the

onset of symptoms. This will help you determine the best treatment.

Tension headaches may take a longer time than vascular headaches to respond to treatment, sometimes up to 24 hours. Remedies consist of balancing the contractive condition of the body with cooling liquids and foods, and foods that are sweet or sour. These include apple juice with lemon (¾ part apple juice with ¼ part fresh-squeezed lemon juice), unsweetened cranberry juice, applesauce with lemon juice, and room-temperature herbal teas, such as chamomile, passionflower, skullcap, and lemon balm, served with lemon.

Other Treatments

Recurring headaches can indicate deeper issues that need addressing. Look first at lifestyle. Allergies can be a reason for recurring headaches. Are you eating foods that might trigger a chemical reaction in your system? Do you have allergies to pollen, mold, grass, or other substances? Poor digestion, constipation, or intestinal infection can also cause headaches in susceptible individuals. Is your diet good? Do you have regular bowel movements? Is your food digested well? If a headache persists or if you have recurring headaches and aren't able to identify the cause, consult with a holistic health practitioner or medical doctor.

The following suggestions are effective, safe treatments for both vascular and tension headaches:

- **Hot herbal footbaths** are wonderful remedies for headaches. See **here** for a good recipe. While soaking your feet in the

hot herbal water, place a cold ice pack on your forehead or the nape of your neck. Also drink a warm nervine tea such as St. John's wort, chamomile, or a blend of feverfew, poppy, and lavender.

- **Valerian tincture** — ¼ teaspoon diluted in warm chamomile tea or water — can be taken every 30 minutes until the headache is gone.
- **Feverfew tea** can be drunk in frequent ¼-cup doses until the headache is gone. Follow the instructions **here**. Make a quart at a time.
- **Niacinamide,** a B vitamin, has been effective for some people suffering from headaches. Take 100 mg three times daily.
- **Changing your activity** is one of the most effective home treatments for tension headaches. If the headache comes after driving for several hours, sitting at a desk, or any other sedentary activity, switch to something more active. Take a brisk walk, jog, or find some other form of vigorous physical activity.

Skullcap Tea

Skullcap is a wonderful herb for treating headaches and nervous stress.

- 2 parts lemon balm
- 2 parts skullcap
- 1 part chamomile
- 1 part feverfew

Combine the herbs. Following the directions **here**, prepare as an infusion. Drink at least ¼ cup every 30 minutes until the headache symptoms are gone.

ABOVE: *Skullcap*

Migraine Headaches

Migraines are similar to tension headaches in that they are contractive in nature and caused by similar imbalances, but they are more severe and are often recurring. They are also more difficult to treat, in part because it is seldom easy to identify what causes a migraine in the first place. Migraines have been linked to genetic factors but more often are the result of allergies or sensitivities to any number of substances, nutritional deficiencies, tension, hormones, immune

suppression, smoke, mold, or a combination of all these factors.

Migraines are a signal from the body to the brain that it's reached a limit; trying to figure out what that limit is is often only half the problem. The other is finding a remedy that is effective. Everyone seems to respond differently to different treatments for migraines, and it often takes dedication to find a remedy that works.

What to Do

Though there are several classifications of migraines, the symptoms and causes are similar and the treatment is much the same. Many of the drugs available for migraines have harmful side effects, and though they offer temporary relief, they don't cure the condition. Migraines are generally corrected only after a long and serious commitment to alter lifestyle patterns that contribute to the problem. Incorporating many of the suggestions listed for tension headaches (see **here**) and those in chapter 3 will be helpful, along with these treatments.

At the first signs of a migraine, begin taking niacinamide (300 mg daily), vitamin B6 (200 mg daily), and rutin (200 mL daily). Divide the doses and take them two or three times during the day. Alacer's Emergen-C is also very effective in helping to prevent migraines when taken at the onset of symptoms. Take two packages (2,000 mL) of Emergen-C twice a day.

Some types of migraines respond remarkably well to a strong dose of coffee, guarana, or other caffeine-rich herbs. In

tension headaches, the veins contract and pressure builds in the head; caffeine quickly dilates the capillaries, initiating a sudden burst of blood through the veins. I have seen this powerful remedy work several times. If it doesn't work, however, you end up not only with a migraine, but also unable to sleep.

Feverfew for Migraines

Feverfew is the herbal medicine with the greatest success rate for migraine sufferers. It is not a "quick fix"; it is more effective as a preventive than as a curative during the acute stages of the migraine. Many people report good results using the tincture or tea, as well as eating one or two fresh leaves daily. It must be used over an extended period of time to be effective, and the herb is better used fresh than dried. Feverfew has few side effects, but it is contraindicated for pregnant women, as it can stimulate blood flow to the pelvis. If you are a menstruating woman and experience cramps or excessive bleeding while using feverfew, discontinue its use.

Jethro Kloss's Famous Antispasmodic Tincture

Jethro Kloss, a famous herbal doctor of the early 1900s, used this formula for treating epilepsy, convulsions, and spastic muscles.

- 1 part black cohosh root
- 1 part lobelia seed or leaf
- 1 part myrrh resin
- 1 part skullcap
- 1 part skunk cabbage leaf
- 1 part valerian root
- 1/4 part cayenne
- Brandy or vodka (80 proof)

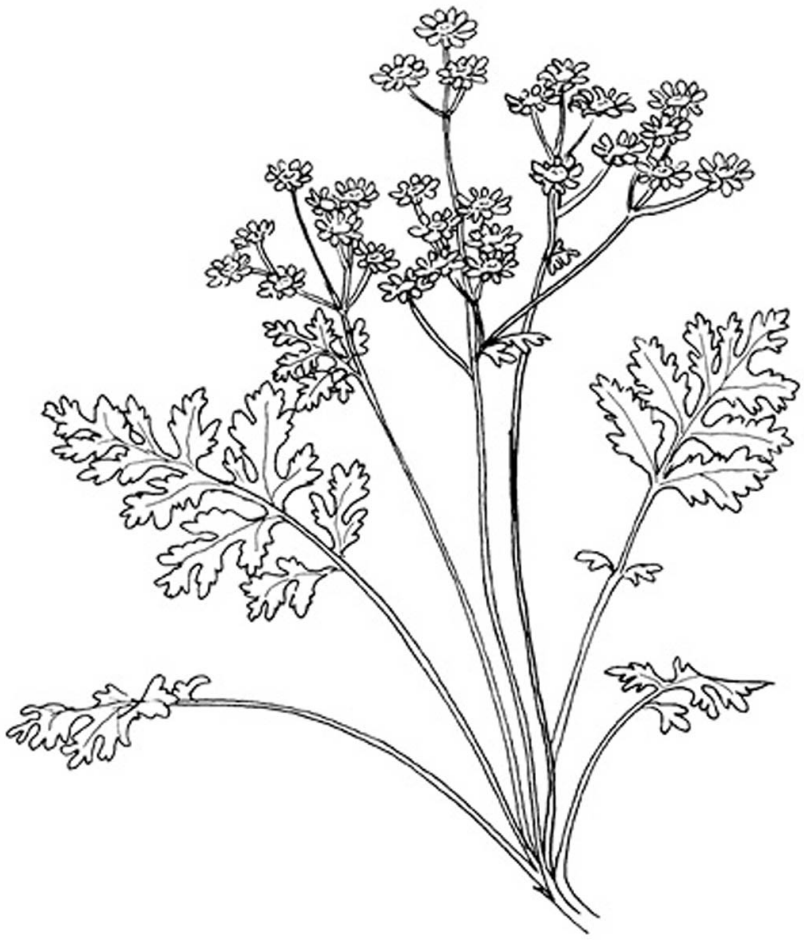
1. Combine the herbs. Place the mixture in a wide-mouth quart jar. Add brandy or vodka until the herbs are covered by 2–3 inches of the alcohol. Put a tight-fitting lid on the jar and place in a warm, shaded area for 4–6 weeks. Shake occasionally to prevent the herbs from settling on the bottom.
2. Strain and rebottle the liquid for use. Take 1/4–1/2 teaspoon of the tincture, diluted in warm water or tea, every 30 minutes or more often until the symptoms subside.

Feverfew Tea or Tincture for Headaches

- 2 parts feverfew
- 1 part California poppy
- 1 part skullcap and/or passionflower leaf
- 1 part St. John's wort
- ½ part lavender

Combine the herbs. To prepare as an infusion, follow the directions **here**. Drink ¼ cup every 30 minutes until headache symptoms have passed.

To make a tincture, follow the directions **here**. Take ½–1 teaspoon 3 times daily.



ABOVE: *Feverfew*

Herpes Outbreaks

A painful viral infection that can remain dormant for many years, herpes has increased in such epidemic proportions that it has become the second most common venereal disease in the United States. Both herpes simplex II (genital herpes) and herpes simplex I (a less painful though even more common type of herpes that appears as cold sores and fever blisters) are

agitated by stress, tension, a compromised immune system, and a sugar-rich diet. Holistic treatment of the nervous system has successfully eliminated many cases and offers not only temporary relief from the virus but lasting results. The following suggestions are also useful in treating shingles (herpes zoster), an even more painful type of herpes that often afflicts the elderly.

Preventing Outbreaks

Herpes is a common virus, existing in several different but related varieties, that thrives on a sugar-rich, acidic system. Eat a diet high in sweet, sugar-rich food and you are actually feeding and nourishing the herpes virus. Allow tension and stress to build up and you'll agitate your nerve endings, which can stimulate a viral outbreak.

A herpes outbreak can be painful, lasting for several days to a couple of weeks. It's best to manage the disease through diet and lifestyle changes. Many people find that once they adopt a natural diet and treatment protocol, they no longer have even occasional outbreaks.

To prevent a herpes outbreak, it's helpful to avoid those foods that agitate or stimulate the virus, especially sugary foods, including high-sugar fruit. Also avoid foods rich in arginine, an amino acid that has been shown to activate the virus; these include peanuts (and peanut butter) and chocolate. As important as what to avoid are the foods to include. Concentrate on nutrient-dense foods that have a rich abundance of calcium and B vitamins. Bitter tonics and alkalizing herbs are important as well. Good choices include

dark green leafy vegetables, fermented foods such as yogurt and kefir, nutritional yeast, spirulina, and miso. (See other dietary suggestions in chapter 3.)

Follow the suggestions in chapter 3 for supporting the nervous system. In addition, take echinacea tincture (¼ teaspoon two to three times a day, five days a week) for three months to build and strengthen immune health. I prefer blending echinacea with astragalus as a tonic immune enhancer. Whenever you experience even the first signs of a herpes outbreak, take ¼–½ teaspoon of the tincture every hour.

Drink several cups a day of bitter teas that are "liver cooling," such as Oregon grape root, dandelion root, and yellow dock root. They will help fight off the infection and alkalize the system. If feelings of depression are overwhelming you, reach for St. John's wort and/or lemon balm. They are worthy friends at such times and have antiviral properties as well.

Drinking lemon balm tea and/or tincture several times a week over a period of several months can prevent herpes outbreaks. Lemon balm is a strong antiviral herb. Try blending it with other antiviral herbs such as licorice root, St. John's wort, echinacea, and spilanthes. Though not as well known in the United States, spilanthes has properties similar to those of echinacea, but with even stronger antiviral and antimicrobial properties. A plant native to semitropical regions of the world, it grows quite easily in the garden and is a delightful little plant "with a punch."

Supplement your diet with 500 mg of L-lysine daily for three months. And if you do have an outbreak, know that some people have experienced excellent results from taking high

doses of L-lysine as treatment. The suggested amount is 2,000 mg three times daily. Do not continue this dosage for any longer than a few days.

Reishi, maitake, shiitake, and turkey tail mushrooms are all indicated for viral infections and help support the function of the immune system. Though the names may sound strange, these mushrooms are quite common. Shiitake, a delicious and tender morsel, can be cooked and eaten with meals. Reishi, maitake, and turkey tail are most often taken in tincture form, though they can be cooked in soup and served several times during the week to support immune function.

Of course, no one can attempt to undertake all these suggestions at once. Instead, select the ideas that are easiest for you, or that make the most sense for your situation.

"Quick Fixes"

It is possible to recognize and treat a herpes outbreak before the lesions appear. As an outbreak begins, your body will relay definite signals to you. Pay attention to these signals, and you can often stop the outbreak in its tracks.

When an outbreak does occur, the following suggestions have all proven helpful for external relief of the lesions. Different cases respond to different treatments, so experiment until you find the one that brings the most relief:

- Licorice root extract applied topically to the lesions is the most effective remedy I know of. Keep a bottle handy and apply at the moment you feel an outbreak occurring. It is

effective on both cold sores and genital herpes. Apply several times daily.

- Another effective treatment is essential oil of lemon balm. Used throughout Europe to treat herpes outbreaks, it is not so well known in the United States, but people have reported excellent results. Apply several times daily.
- Aloe vera gel brings a cooling relief and helps to gently dry up the herpes blisters. Apply several times daily.
- Combine green volcanic clay, organically cultivated goldenseal or Chinese coptis, and myrrh powder. Mix into a paste with water or aloe vera gel and spread over the blisters.
- An herbal salve made with St. John's wort, comfrey, and calendula is wonderfully soothing and healing. You can purchase this salve ready-made or make your own. However, use it sparingly; salve can "seal in" the virus, making a perfect petri dish for it to grow in.
- A mixture of yogurt and acidophilus applied to genital blisters will help heal them, although it may sting a bit at first.

Insomnia

Insomnia in all its many forms (the American Sleep Disorders Association currently classifies 78 different sleep disorders) affects approximately one in three Americans at some time during their life. Not only does insomnia leave us worn out and tired, but it also can agitate stress and anxiety, provoking a chronic sense of distress and depletion.

All the good advice about how long we should sleep is just bedside talk. It is an entirely personal subject. For some, eight hours of sleep is barely sufficient, while others are well sustained on six hours or even less. Thomas Edison was known to sleep four to five hours a night. If you wake up refreshed, feeling the day smile at you, with a good amount of energy, and you are alert through most of the day, then you are getting enough sleep. If you constantly awaken tired, need caffeine to "kick-start" the day, or find yourself irritable and depressed, then you probably need more sleep and/or fewer stimulants.

Unless you venture to try sleeping pills, with all their corresponding side effects, there are no "solutions in a bottle" for insomnia. But there are wonderfully safe and effective natural remedies that are especially effective when combined with a few simple lifestyle choices.

Lavender Oil Baths

A pleasant "remedy" that works wonders is a warm herbal bath before bedtime. Add 10 to 12 drops of pure lavender essential oil to a warm tub of water. Soak for 20 minutes. Dry and lightly massage sesame seed oil into your skin. (In the science of Ayurvedic medicine, sesame seed oil is calming to the nervous system.) Then pop yourself straight into bed.

Hot Footbath

A hot footbath before bedtime can be just as helpful as a full-body bath and is especially effective when you feel physically drained or chronically tired. Again, add lavender essential oil

(just a few drops) to the water, and soak your feet for at least 20 minutes. While you're enjoying the soak, sip a cup of Ashwagandha Tea (see the recipe **here**) or a tea made from equal parts of skullcap, chamomile, and lemon balm.

Herbs for Insomnia

Many herbs have a long history of use for treating insomnia. The trick is finding the right herb or combination of herbs for your particular type of insomnia. Here are a few suggestions:

- **Ashwagandha.** For those people who have been working overtime and feel chronically "burned out" or tired, ashwagandha is the perfect insomnia remedy. It helps rebuild the nervous system and adrenal glands. Ashwagandha can be taken in the evening before bedtime (see the tea recipe **here**), but it should also be taken throughout the day to help restore adrenal health. Drink a cup of tea two or three times during the day, and then again just before bedtime.
- **Chamomile.** Chamomile is without doubt one of the most widely recognized herbs for mild insomnia and is especially valuable for small children and the elderly. It has a long history of use for calming and relaxing the nervous system and helps those who feel anxious and restless before bedtime. Delicious as a tea, chamomile is also effective when used in herbal baths and footbaths.
- **Hops.** A strong tonic for the nervous system, this herb is especially useful for insomnia due to hypertension, as it helps ease tension and anxiety. It is also a powerful bitter

and can help relieve gastrointestinal stress. Try mixing equal parts of hops and valerian in tincture form, and take ½ teaspoon every hour starting 3 hours before bedtime. If you wake up in the night and have difficulty returning to sleep, take 1 tablespoon of the mixture. (Please note: Hops are not recommended for those suffering from long-term depression.)

ABOVE: *Hops*

- **Kava-kava.** When insomnia is due to chronic stress and anxiety, and/or the muscles of the body are tight, kava is an

effective tonic. Take ½ teaspoon of the tincture every hour starting 3 to 4 hours before bedtime, then again just before going to bed.

- **Skullcap.** This herb is particularly effective for those with "busy minds" who lie awake thinking of all the things they need to do the next day. Take 2 to 3 cups of tea daily, or ½ to 1 teaspoon of tincture diluted in warm water three times daily. It's also excellent as a sleep aid combined with valerian; see step 1 on the next page.
- **Valerian.** This is one of my favorite herbs for insomnia. Valerian is relaxing to both the central and peripheral nervous systems, so both mind and muscles respond to its gentle, calming effects. Keep a bottle of valerian tincture by your bedside, and if you wake up in the middle of the night, take a healthy tablespoon or two of the tincture. With valerian, "more as needed" is fine. (Please note: If you try valerian and feel stimulated by it rather than relaxed, discontinue use. You are among the small percentage of the population who react to the stimulating rather than calming properties of this plant.)

Developing Awareness

Temporary insomnia can be used as a tool to develop psychic awareness. Those unusual waking hours are an excellent time to write in your journal, pray, and do "inner" work that is difficult to find time for during the day. If insomnia persists, however, it will wear down the psyche, because rest is essential to the health of the nervous system.

Simple Steps for a Restful Night of Sleep

Step 1. Beginning 4 hours before bedtime, take a tincture combination of valerian and skullcap, 1/4. to 1/2 teaspoon every hour. (Or combine valerian with any of the other herbs listed **here** that are more specific for your case of insomnia.)

Step 2. Four hours before bedtime, take a calcium/magnesium formula or a cup of High Calcium Tea (see **here**).

Step 3. Half an hour before bedtime, take a warm lavender bath or footbath. While you're soaking, drink a cup of Ashwagandha Tea (see **here**).

Step 4. Keep a tincture combination of valerian and skullcap (or whatever herb combination seems to work for you) by your bedside. If you do wake in the night, take 1/2 to 1 teaspoon, as needed. Do not try to force yourself back to sleep. That is an

exhausting process and seldom works. Instead, keep a boring book by your bedside and read. Or draw a hot herbal bath and soak for 30 minutes or so. Sip a strong nervine tea (see opposite page) while soaking.

If you're experiencing a long-term period of insomnia, follow the suggestions in chapter 3 for strengthening the nervous system. Include massage, footbaths, lavender oil baths, and daily exercise. Before bedtime take a 20-minute (or so) walk; go barefoot, if possible, to connect with the earth. For many people, exercise relaxes the nervous system and allows a deep sleep. Avoid alcohol, sugar, and caffeine, all of which overstimulate the nervous system and can add to restless sleep patterns.

Nervine Formula for Insomnia

This blend is extremely effective if taken in frequent doses before bedtime. It will be quite bitter due to the hops; you may wish to tincture it, in which case increase the amount of hops and valerian.

- 3 parts chamomile
- 1 part oats (milky green tops)
- 1 part passionflower
- 1 part valerian
- ½ part hops

Combine the herbs. Following the instructions **here**, prepare as an infusion. Take small, frequent doses of the formula starting about 3 hours before bedtime.

ABOVE: *Chamomile*

Sleep Pillow

One of my favorite ways to use hops is to sew them into sleep or dream pillows. This practice dates back hundreds of years. The lavender oil enhances the herbs' relaxing effects. For vivid dreams, add an equal amount of mugwort to the blend.

- 1 part dried chamomile
- 1 part dried hops
- 1 part dried lavender
- 1 part dried roses
- 1–2 drops lavender oil

Mix the herbs. Stuff a small pillow with the herb mixture. Sleep with it tucked into your pillowcase, close to your head.

Ashwagandha Tea

This is an age-old remedy for insomnia and encourages deep and restful sleep for all. Cow's milk is preferable for this tea, since it contains tryptophan, which promotes sleepiness, but soy, almond, or rice milk can be substituted.

- 1 cup milk
- 1 teaspoon powdered ashwagandha
- ½ teaspoon ground cinnamon
- ½ teaspoon honey

Warm the milk, then add the ashwaghandha, cinnamon, and honey and stir to blend. Sip slowly.

Seasonal Affective Disorder

When I moved from California, the land of sunshine, to Vermont, I understood for the first time how someone could get SAD during a long winter. A form of "winter blues" most common in the northern latitudes, seasonal affective disorder (SAD) is associated with a lack of sunlight. People affected by SAD usually begin to feel symptoms increasing around the time of the winter solstice, the darkest day of the year, and

decreasing as the light returns in early spring. Symptoms include depression, low energy, headaches, moodiness, irritability, and weight gain or loss, and can be severe. SAD is linked with hormone production and endocrine activity, but like so many imbalances of the nervous system, it's not fully understood why some people are so susceptible to light fluctuations while others experience just a normal bit of gloom at the prospect of another gray day in the northlands.

Thankfully, full-spectrum light therapy is a simple, noninvasive treatment that makes a huge difference in the quality of life for those who suffer from SAD. But there are other natural remedies that can make a difference as well:

- **Herbs.** Herbs that support the nervous and endocrine systems and may help both to prevent and lessen the effects of SAD include ashwagandha, lemon balm, rhodiola, and St. John's wort.
- **Light!** Bring as much natural light into your home and life as possible. Daily walks are highly recommended. Get outdoors.
- **Light therapy.** Full-spectrum light therapy can extend your time in the light each day. As little as 30 minutes a day of exposure to a "light box" with 10,000 lux of high-intensity light makes a big difference in building "lighter" moods. Combine light therapy with 500 to 900 mg daily of St. John's wort for even better results.
- **5-HTP.** The supplement 5-hydroxytryptophan (5-HTP) is often used by naturopathic and holistic doctors to raise levels of serotonin, a neurotransmitter that helps improve mood, relieve depression, promote better quality of sleep, and

(perhaps) regulate weight gain/loss. The recommended dose of 5-HTP is between 50 and 100 mg three times a day.

- **Vitamin D.** Getting sufficient amounts of vitamin D is important all through the year, but it is especially important in the winter months when sunlight, a primary source of vitamin D, is limited as we tend to spend less time outdoors. Vitamin D's most important role is maintaining adequate levels of calcium in the blood, which in turn nourishes the entire nervous system, muscles, and bones. Vitamin D also plays an essential role as a mood regulator and can help alleviate the symptoms of SAD. If you live in a northern climate, work indoors, and don't get daily exposure to sunlight, then supplementing with vitamin D is recommended during the winter months. The recommended dosage is 500 to 800 IU per day, though this varies with individuals.

Travel Stress

Traveling, often a wonderfully exciting experience, can also be extremely stressful, especially when it involves flying. Flying subjects the body to added stress and recycled air, and it upsets our natural rhythms by interfering with our biological time clocks. People who fly often find themselves with compromised immune systems and can be more prone to illness, stress, and depression. Following are some tips for staying healthy in the air:

- Take echinacea to build up your immune system for one week before traveling. Keep a bottle of the tincture handy; use it if others on the plane are sneezing or coughing, and at the first signs of illness.
- Kava is the traveler's friend. It can help take the anxiety out of the most stressful situation. It's especially useful for nervous situations such as flight delays, long waits on the runway, and turbulence. When the journey gets boring, it can "spice" life up a bit, relaxing the body while expanding the mind. Oh yes, and it also makes your tongue tingle!
- Rescue Remedy is the traveler's first-aid kit. Use it during stressful or traumatic situations. It's tasteless, very effective, perfectly safe for anybody, and not contraindicated by other types of medication.
- Ginger is good for motion sickness and nausea. My mentor, Juliette de Bairacli Levy, always traveled with ginger candy for stomach disorders. The problem for me is that it's so delicious that I often eat it all up as a snack. So I usually carry ginger powder and capsules as well.
- It is essential to drink extra water when flying. I usually pack an empty quart bottle that I can fill once I'm through security. They do serve water on planes, but it's never enough. You'll find it easier to drink the right amounts if you have a large bottle with you.
- For jet lag, a tincture combination of reishi, rhodiola, and ginkgo helps reset the body's internal clock. Begin taking the tincture, ½ to 1 teaspoon three times a day, three to four days before flying. This combination is also an excellent remedy for altitude sickness.

- Melatonin is another effective remedy for jet lag and in most cases will reduce or eliminate it. Take ½ to 1 mg of melatonin before flying.
- Pack a half-ounce bottle of essential oil of lavender, virtually "first aid in a bottle." I use lavender essential oil for, well, almost everything: as a disinfectant, for burns, for deep relaxation, in the bath, in massage oil, in a refreshing spritzer (for the face as well as hotel rooms). It is also helpful for headaches. Try a cool lavender poultice (a hand towel or bandana soaked in cold water with a few drops of lavender oil added) on your head while soaking your feet in a tub of very hot water with a few drops of lavender essential oil added.
- Adaptogenic herbs can help relieve the stress of traveling. A favorite combination is kava, rhodiola, and Siberian ginseng. These three adaptogenic nervine herbs help restore energy while relaxing and strengthening the nervous system. Take this combination before traveling and have it on hand during the trip as well. You can use ½ to 1 teaspoon of the tincture three times a day, or as needed.
- A small spritzer bottle filled with fresh water, a few drops of essential oil of lavender, and a drop or two of Rescue Remedy is the perfect remedy for stale airplane air. Check with your seatmate before misting the air.
- Finally, I always travel with Alacer's Emergen-C. I find this brand of vitamin C to be particularly helpful for eliminating jet lag, warding off sickness, and providing bursts of energy when I need them. Taking two at a time is recommended.

How Do I Pack All This?

Does it seem that there must be no room left in my suitcase for anything else? Actually, I pack my herbal first-aid kit in a small cosmetics bag. It amounts to three bottles of tincture (kava, schizandra/Siberian ginseng, and echinacea), a small bag of powdered ginger, a half-ounce bottle of Rescue Remedy, a small container of melatonin, several packages of Emergen-C, and three small bottles of essential oils (lavender, peppermint, and tea tree). Have I ever gotten sick from all the flying I do? Only once. I had some unexplainable stomach pains that were, I'm convinced, from butterflies in my stomach because I was going to see my sweetheart for the first time.

Excellent Herbal Formulas for the Nervous System

The following herbal formulas are among my favorites for the nervous system. Each of the herbs included here provides nutrients that help strengthen and support this marvelous system. Some of the formulas are calming or pain relieving. Others are energizing and uplifting.

Ginkgo Leaf Tea

For increased memory, emotional stability, and energy, try this formula.

- 2 parts ginkgo leaf
- 1 part gotu kola
- 1 part peppermint
- 1 part rhodiola

Combine the herbs. Following the instructions **here**, prepare as an infusion. Drink 3–4 cups daily for 3–4 months. In order for this formula to be effective, it is best to take it for several weeks in cycles: for instance, drink the tea for 5 days, stop for 2 days, then repeat, continuing this cycle for 3–4 months. Or take it for 2 weeks, stop for 1 week, and repeat.

Kava-Valerian Tea for Pain and Anxiety

This is a deeply relaxing and analgesic (pain-relieving) blend.

- 1 part kava
- ½ part licorice root
- 1 part valerian root

Following the instructions **here**, decoct the kava and licorice root for 15 minutes. Turn off the heat and add the valerian root. Infuse for 45 minutes. Strain; drink as much and as often as needed.

It's hard to camouflage the flavor of valerian, so you might wish to make this into a tincture instead of a tea; follow the instructions **here**.

Memory Lane: Brain Tonic Tincture

This is often the first tincture I teach my students how to make. It calms and strengthens the nervous system and increases memory. It must be used consistently for at least 4–6 weeks before a difference is noticed.

- 2 parts ginkgo leaf
- 2 parts gotu kola
- 2 parts rhodiola
- 1 part peppermint
- ½ part rosemary
- Brandy or vodka (80 proof)

Place the herbs in a wide-mouth jar and add enough alcohol to cover the herbs by about 3 inches. Cover the jar with a tight-fitting lid and place in a warm, shaded area for 6–8 weeks. Shake the bottle every few days to prevent the herbs from settling on the bottom. Strain and rebottle for use. Take ½–1 teaspoon of tincture diluted in ¼ cup warm water, juice, or tea twice daily for 2–3 months.

High Calcium Tea

This tea is meant to be used over a 3- to 4-month period. By supplying calcium, it provides a calming action to the nervous system.

- 1 part horsetail (shave grass)
- 1 part nettle leaf
- 1 part oats (milky green tops) and oatstraw
- 1 part raspberry leaf
- 1 part peppermint or spearmint (for flavor; optional)

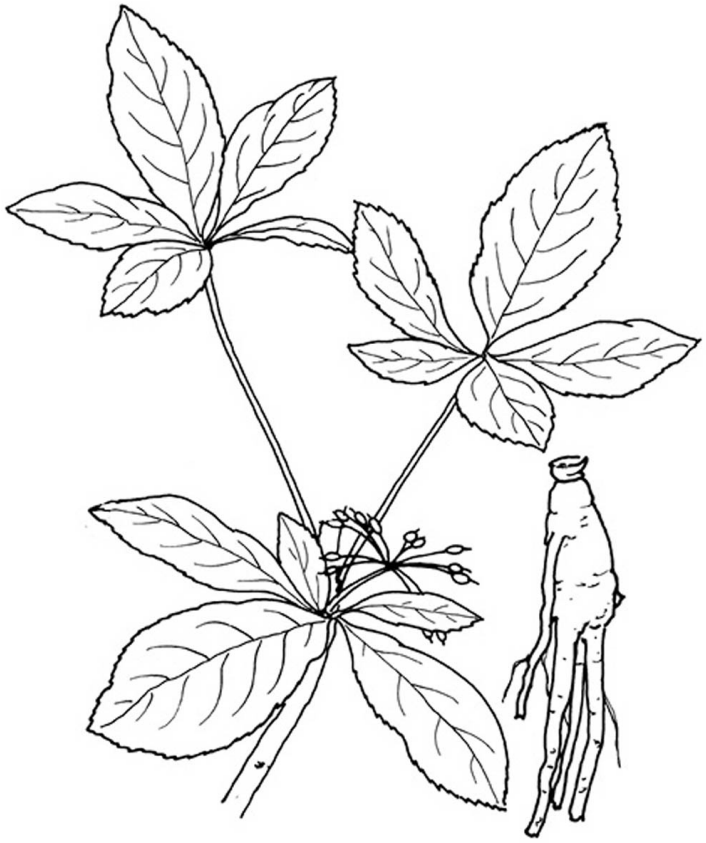
Combine the herbs. Following the directions **here**, prepare as an infusion. Drink 3–4 cups daily.

Energizing Chai Nerve Tonic

This is a long-term energizing and revitalizing root blend. It's delicious served with warm milk, a sprinkle of cinnamon on top, and honey to taste. Turn up the heat by adding a tiny amount of cayenne or black pepper. If you're trying to cut down on your caffeine intake, this tea is a great substitute for coffee.

- 2 parts eleuthero (Siberian ginseng)
- 1 part cinnamon
- 1 part licorice root
- 1 part rhodiola
- ½ part ginger
- ½ part ginseng root, sliced
- ¼ part cardamom seed
- Pinch of cayenne or black pepper (optional)

Combine the herbs. Following the directions **here**, prepare as a decoction. Drink 1–2 cups daily for a long-term energizing effect.



ABOVE: *Siberian ginseng*

CHAPTER THREE

Strengthening the Nervous System

This chapter contains tips and techniques for building and strengthening the nervous system (NS). They can be used in conjunction with other forms of treatments, such as allopathic medication or various systems of natural medicine to create a holistic treatment plan for building strength and vitality.

As with most forms of natural healing, *consistency* is the key to health and well-being. Herbs and natural remedies will not always alleviate pain and nervous stress as quickly as allopathic drugs that are designed to block or deaden nerve responses. Natural therapies will, when used over an extended period of time, rebuild the nerve connections and create a lasting flow of vibrant energy. Most natural therapies for NS disorders are based on nutrition, herbs, exercise, and lifestyle modifications. If we're stressed, anxious, or depressed, then it's important to first assess our life situation and make changes where we can. Always easier said than done, it's important to be loving to ourselves and to slowly begin making those changes that are easiest and most doable. Small steps that steadily lead the way are better than big changes that soon become impossible to keep up.

Use Nutrition as a Pathway to Health

Dietary imbalances and unhealthy eating patterns contribute to and exacerbate many NS disorders, especially those associated with stress, depression, and anxiety. Depression is sometimes found to be caused by nothing else but a lack of

certain essential nutrients. Adjust the diet, and depression is lifted.

On the flip side, a well-balanced diet will support and build a healthy nervous system. Natural whole foods contain the full spectrum of vitamins, minerals, protein, oils, and other essential nutrients needed by the body for optimum health. Though hundreds of new "healthy" or "weight-loss" diets are introduced every year, there is no such thing as the perfect diet for everyone. We each have to find a balanced way of eating that supports our own particular body and lifestyle, and, I might add, the health of the community around us. It's not possible to remain healthy for long in a community that's unhealthy. Eating organically, eating locally, and eating in season are all good guidelines to follow for building personal health as well as resiliency in our communities.

Eating for good health requires paying attention to your body and discovering what's deeply nourishing and healthy for you. Some simple ways to support good health and a strong, resilient nervous system include the following:

- Eat in season.
- Eat foods in their natural form as much as possible, with little or no processing.
- Avoid foods that contain preservatives, food colorings, and other chemical additives. These substances have been introduced into the food chain in the last 50 years; they're nothing like the naturally occurring foods that our bodies have evolved to digest and assimilate.
- Eat a variety of foods; diversify your eating habits.

- Enjoy what you eat. Meals should be a pleasure, something to look forward to each day, a communion shared with family and friends as much as possible.
- If your diet doesn't sustain you, adjust what you eat. If you are worn out and tired, feeling depressed and stressed, or have continuing digestive issues such as indigestion, constipation, or loose bowels, then reevaluate what you eat.

If you don't know where to turn for good advice, consult with a holistic nutritionist or a holistic health-care provider. Most people never consider the food they eat until they're ill and unhealthy, but our daily food intake provides the basics of good health and how we feel on a regular basis. It's worth the investment if help and advice are needed.

Vitamin and Mineral Supplements

Vitamin and mineral supplements can play an important part in a holistic health protocol, but they are an expensive addition, and most vitamin/mineral pills are not “natural” (that is, made by nature), despite the claims of many product labels. Nevertheless, vitamin and mineral supplements can be a quick source of nutrients and can help restore health and balance. I often recommend them to those who don’t have the ability to grow or cook their own food, or to get good produce from a farmers’ market. However, the best and least expensive way for us to obtain the whole spectrum of nutrients we need to function optimally is to eat wholesome good food.

Essential Nutrients for Nervous System Health

A diet specific to NS health should emphasize alkalizing foods such as fresh dark green leafy vegetables, high-quality protein, seaweed or sea greens, whole grains, root vegetables, cultured milk products (such as yogurt, kefir, and buttermilk), sour fruit (such as grapefruit, cherries, and lemons), and seeds and nuts. The following are suggestions for food sources that contain the essential vitamins and minerals specifically needed for the health of the nervous system.

Calcium

Calcium is well known for its role in building strong bones and teeth. Its role in the health of the nervous system is not as well known, yet it is essential for healthy nerve function. Proper amounts of blood calcium prevent nervousness, irritability, muscle spasms, muscle cramping, hyperactivity, and insomnia. Fortunately, calcium is abundant in our diets and is found in easily digestible forms in seaweed, yogurt and other cultured milk products, and most dark green leafy vegetables such as spinach, chard, broccoli, turnip greens, kale, beet greens, and parsley. It is also found in high amounts in almonds and sesame seeds. (Though milk is touted as a good source of calcium, it is, in fact, sorely lacking in the amounts and type needed by our bodies.)

Seaweeds are particularly high in calcium. A major food source in many parts of the world, seaweed is often neglected as a high-calcium food in American diets. For comparison, 3 ½ ounces of cow's milk contains 118 mg of calcium. The same amount of hizike (a mild-flavored seaweed) contains 1,400 mg, kelp contains 1,093 mg, and wakame contains 1,300 mg.

Along with foods high in calcium, you may wish to add a calcium supplement to your diet during times of high stress or anxiety, or when you're working to ease a NS disorder. If using pills, be certain the calcium is from an organic source and is biochelated for easier assimilation.

Herbs that provide high-quality calcium include:

- Amaranth
- Chickweed

- Dandelion greens
- Horsetail
- Mustard greens
- Nettles
- Oats
- Watercress

B Vitamins

The B vitamin complex comprises 11 essential vitamins. All are dependent on one another and are essential for mental health, a well-balanced nervous system, and healthy metabolism. When symptoms of mental distress or disorders such as irritability, nervousness, panic attacks, excessive fear, depression, or suicidal tendencies appear, they are often an indication of B vitamin deficiency.

Though each B vitamin has a specific role in the physiology of the body and psychology of the mind, they are synergistic with one another. An excess of one of the B vitamins for a long period of time will, sooner or later, result in a deficiency of the others. B vitamins are most effective when taken as a complex.

For NS disorders look for those foods that are especially high in pantothenic acid (B5) and pyridoxine (B6). Vitamin B5 is the most important of the B vitamins for relieving stress. Vitamin B6 together with vitamin C helps to form the neurotransmitter serotonin, which promotes calm moods and deep sleep. (Sleep itself is an important factor in maintaining normal serotonin levels. People who are sleep-deprived often

suffer from low serotonin levels, resulting in anxiety, stress, and mental distress.)

The B vitamins are found in high concentrations in dark green leafy vegetables, whole grains (such as whole wheat, brown rice, and oatmeal), yogurt, kefir, molasses, and dried beans. Nuts and seeds are also generally high in B vitamins. Some of the highest sources of B vitamins are nutritional yeast and spirulina.

Herbs that are high in B vitamins include:

- Dandelion greens
- Nettle
- Parsley
- Seaweeds
- Sesame seeds
- Wild oats

Spirulina

Spirulina is a blue-green algae that grows on freshwater ponds. Respected as an excellent source of nutrition in many cultures for centuries (it was popular in the Aztec and Mayan cultures as well as in Asian cultures), it found its way into the American diet only a few decades ago, and only in a limited manner. Its use is primarily restricted to those who shop in natural foods stores. Too bad, as it could benefit so many!

An excellent nutrient for the nervous systems, spirulina is rich in B vitamins and gamma-linolenic acid (GLA), which helps reduce inflammation and, thus, reduces nerve irritation.

It is 60 to 70 percent protein by weight, second only to dried whole eggs as a source of protein. People often complain about the flavor of spirulina, but it is far better than that of dried eggs!

Spirulina is available in tablet and powder form. I recommend the powder for quality and economy, but most people find the "green" taste and appearance overpowering and opt for the tablets. A recommended amount would be 1 to 2 tablespoons of the powder or 6 to 10 tablets daily. Though people sometimes balk at the high price, it is quite economical when purchased by the pound. My favorite spirulina preparation is Rachel's Green Drink, which contains not only spirulina but several other blue-green algae, herbs, and whole food nutrients (see the resources).

Nutritional Yeast

Nutritional yeast, commonly referred to as brewer's yeast, is a superior source of protein and includes all of the essential amino acids. It provides therapeutic benefits for most NS disorders. Along with its 50 percent protein content, nutritional yeast is also one of the best sources of the entire B vitamin complex (excluding B12). Nutritional yeast is also an excellent source of many minerals and trace elements, including selenium, chromium, iron, potassium, and phosphorus, and it is extraordinarily rich in nucleic acids.

Yeast comes in powders, flakes, and tablets. The powder is the most potent, the flakes dissolve more easily and often taste the best, and the tablets are the least effective and most costly. Cooking with nutritional yeast will destroy some of the B

vitamins and nutrients, so it is best to eat it in its raw state. Mix with juices, protein shakes, and blender drinks, and sprinkle it on vegetables, casseroles, soups, salads, and popcorn. There are numerous creative ways you can find to enjoy this potent, vitamin-laden substance. *Note*: Nutritional yeast is *not* baker's yeast.

When I first began using nutritional yeast 35 years ago, there was only one kind available, the by-product of breweries, and it was bitter. But I appreciated its high nutritional content and found ways to enjoy it in tomato juice, mixed in grain dishes, with cottage cheese, and in soups and salads. Today, most brands of nutritional yeast have a nice flavor and are actually enjoyable. To help your taste buds adjust to the flavor, start by taking small amounts of nutritional yeast (1 teaspoon twice a day) and work up to 1 to 2 tablespoons.

If you are depleted of B vitamins or lack digestive flora, nutritional yeast may at first cause gas and bloating if you take too much at once; experiment with small amounts until you find the amount that works best for you. And note that some practitioners advise people who suffer from yeast infections (*Candida albicans*) against eating yeast or fermented foods, as it may agitate the yeast infection. I have not found this to be the case, but it is the current popular opinion and I will respectfully pass it on.

Yeast and Beer?

In spite of its nutritional credentials, many people shy away from eating nutritional yeast because of the flavor. Originally a by-product of the beer-making industry, this microscopic plant organism, *Saccharomyces cerevisiae*, was grown in vats containing grain, malt, and hops. Yeast took on the characteristic bitter flavor of the hops. Most yeast on the market today, however, does not come from breweries. It is grown on various media, including molasses, sugar beets, whey, and wood sugar, for the purpose of being sold as nutritional supplements, and the flavor has greatly improved.

Fermented Foods

Did your granny, like mine, have jars of colorful vegetables foaming and fermenting in her pantry? Or leave her milk sitting on the counter to be magically transformed into yogurt or kefir? All around the world, for thousands of years, people have used various techniques to ferment or “culture” food, turning milk, grains, vegetables, and fruits into sauerkraut, pickles, kimchi, miso, tempeh, yogurt, and buttermilk, among others. These foods not only are staples in millions of people’s diets but also are recognized for their positive effect in promoting health and well-being.

Fermentation is far more than an excellent technique for preserving food. It also encourages the development of

numerous “friendly” bacteria, or probiotics, including *Lactobacillus acidophilus*, *Bifidobacterium*, and *Streptococcus*. These bacteria colonize the stomach and colon, improving digestion, assimilation, and elimination. Fermentation also improves the nutritive value of food, increasing the availability of many vitamins and minerals, including the B vitamin complex, vitamin C, calcium, and protein — all essential to a healthy nervous system. By including a small amount of fermented food in your diet, you begin to replenish and rebuild a depleted nervous system.

For recipes and further information on fermented foods, these two books are excellent resources: *The Art of Fermentation* by Sandor Katz and *Nourishing Traditions* by Sally Fallon.

Avoid Nervous-System Irritants

If we are to achieve optimum NS health, there are certain foods that are best avoided or used only in small amounts. Rather than being redundant (most people are aware that these foods are potential troublemakers), I list them here as a gentle reminder that, ultimately, they are really not worth the trouble they cause.

Coffee and Other Caffeine-Rich Foods

Stimulants are contraindicated in most imbalances involving the nervous system. Foods high in caffeine, especially, are to be avoided. Not only do they overstimulate an already tired system, but they further agitate the adrenal glands, contributing to adrenal exhaustion, fatigue, and depression. Adrenal exhaustion is the root cause of many of the problems associated with the nervous system and plays a big part in depression and anxiety disorders.

Processed, Refined Foods

The foods that fall into this category fill huge grocery stores and occupy most of the space in people's kitchen cabinets. In a short period of history we have digressed from an almost totally natural diet dependent on the earth's simple riches, to a diet replete with food colorings, pesticides, synthetic hormones, and, most recently, genetically engineered foods. This chemical bath we subject our bodies to daily has taken its toll. For a complete discussion on the effects of this change in the eating patterns of our species, I direct you to two excellent books: *Nourishing Traditions* by Sally Fallon and *Healing with Whole Foods* by Paul Pitchford. If you believe that diet doesn't affect your health, follow the guidelines that Andrew Weil sets forth in *8 Weeks to Optimum Health*. If you don't feel better after eight weeks on his suggested regime, then you are one of those rare individuals whom food doesn't affect.

Sugars and Sweets

Sugar in all its many forms provides quick, high-powered energy to the body. The problem is that we use the energy quickly and often are left feeling more tired than ever. The huge sugar consumption of Americans — we consume more than 126 pounds per person per year — may be more directly linked to the abnormally high rates of depression, anxiety, and personality disorders we experience than we have previously thought.

Aside from providing short-term energy, sugar depletes the nervous system by utilizing precious calcium in its digestive process. The nervous system is dependent on high levels of blood calcium in order to function at its maximum potential. Sugar competes for this calcium. No wonder you feel agitated, annoyed, or depressed after a sugar binge has worn off. Calcium levels drop as the sugar is digested, leaving irritable nerve endings.

A special mention of chocolate, everyone's sacred food! Called "the food of the gods" in the languages of the people who first discovered and used it, chocolate was and is a "sacred" food. Like most substances held sacred, it was not traditionally consumed daily in large amounts but was savored on special occasions. Chocolate originally was served as a bitter drink or sauce. It wasn't sweetened with sugar but, rather, was mixed and served with other bitter herbs and spiced with hot pepper. These original formulas, by my standards, make far more interesting and complex chocolate blends. Chocolate remains a favorite treat for many people and is consumed in huge quantities. But if your health is less than you wish it to be, you might consider saving chocolate for those special

occasions, and try cultivating a taste for the complex bitter flavors rather than oversweetened varieties.

Alcohol

Alcohol is often sought as a crutch during times of stress and depression, but in fact it further depresses the system. When you're suffering from NS disorders, even small amounts of alcohol can be disorienting. It is a highly addictive substance for some people. Alcohol addiction — as with addiction of any kind — is challenging at best, and devastating at worst. It's difficult to recover from its grips without personal loss and an ironclad will.

Alcohol, like sugar, demands calcium in its digestive process, thus leaching the nervous system of valuable nutrients. When suffering from NS imbalances, it is best to avoid alcohol altogether, or to drink only moderate amounts. If you tend toward alcohol sensitivity, depression, anxiety, or panic attacks, avoid alcohol as if your life depended on it. It might. Don't even use alcohol-based tinctures. Though they contain only a small amount of alcohol — less than 1 teaspoon in an adult dose — they can trigger an alcoholic response. Instead, use tinctures made with glycerin or vinegar, or take your herbs in capsules and tea instead.

Supportive Therapies for Nervous System Health

We all yearn to feel balanced, in harmony, and at peace with our environment, but we often are distracted by the chaotic nature of the world we live in and then expect a "quick ride" back to our place of center and calm. There are ways to be fully present and involved in the chaos of the world but still remain calm, centered, and at peace with our inner environment.

I have found that even in the busiest of lifestyles we can maintain that sense of center we long for, but it requires commitment to maintain and sustain that sense of well-being. Acknowledging the intricate connection between our nervous system and the environment around us is important; knowing what foods feed and build our nervous system and which deplete us is essential. Equally important is being conscious of what creates for us as individuals that feeling of calm in the eye of the storm. Is it prayer? A specific mantra? Connection with nature? Connection with ourselves as we move, exercise, and interact with the world around us?

Several adjunct therapies can support the health and vitality of the nervous system and help us feel calm in a crazy world. Combined with other therapies — herbs, diet, and whole food supplements — these simple practices can help guide us to that calm centered place within. When we nourish and strengthen our nervous system, we feel the connection we long for and the strength we hope for.

Herbal Footbaths for Energizing

For many people, stress focuses in their head. It gets stuck, so to speak, in the mental plane. This is perhaps why stress so often results in headaches and mental disorders. Though hot

herbal footbaths feel great anytime, they are especially recommended for headaches and mental stress. They are deeply relaxing, easy to do, and are an excellent way to relieve head tension and stress.

This headache/stress treatment takes more time and energy than swallowing an aspirin, but the results will be deeply satisfying and long lasting.

Herbal Footbath

You may, of course, use any combination of relaxing herbs you have at hand. Mustard powder, ginger, sage, and rosemary are all good herbs for footbaths. Quaker Oats are excellent, also, and will do in a pinch.

- 2 parts lavender
- 1 part hops
- 1 part sage
- ½ part rosemary
- A few drops lavender essential oil (optional)

1. Place the herbs in a large pot and fill with water. Place a lid on tightly and bring to a low simmer. Simmer over low heat for 5–10 minutes. Pour into a large basin, add the lavender essential oil (if using), and adjust the temperature with cold water. Keep the footbath water *very* hot. It should be hot enough to be almost uncomfortable but without burning the feet.

2. Make yourself comfortable in the softest, coziest chair you have. Slowly immerse your feet in the water. Cover the basin with a thick towel to keep the heat in. Refill the basin with hot herbal tea as it cools. While you soak, play quiet, relaxing music in the background or listen to the silence. Sip a cup of chamomile or feverfew-lavender tea. And if you can,

have a friend massage your feet, head, and shoulders.

ABOVE: *Lavender*

Herbal Baths for Relaxing

To make an herbal bath, follow the same instructions given for footbaths, but increase the amount of herbs used. I generally suggest 3 to 4 ounces of herbs per tub. Lavender essential oil enhances the calming effects of the bath.

Herbal Bath

- 2 parts lavender
- 1 part hops
- 1 part sage
- ½ part rosemary
- A few drops lavender essential oil (optional)

Tie the herbs in a large cotton cloth (a scarf works well) and attach directly to the nozzle of the tub. Run hot water through the herbal bag until the tub is half filled, and then adjust the temperature with cold water. Stir in lavender essential oil (if using). Enjoy a long soak.

Massage and Body Therapies

People have found relief from stress and tension in the many forms of massage therapy offered today. Because we recognize that much of the psychological tension and stress of the

nervous system is held in the physical body, gentle manipulation of the muscles that hold that tension is often extremely helpful. A well-trained massage practitioner not only has the ability to work out present tension but also is able to train the body to release tension as it builds.

Many people consider massage an unaffordable luxury, but in times of nervous stress and life upheavals it is often a valuable and necessary therapeutic technique. There are many systems of massage, from gentle Esalen/Swedish-style massage to deep tissue work. As with most therapies, you may have to experiment and research the various systems before deciding which form works best for you.

Massage is among my favorite methods of relieving stress. It works for muscle stress as well as stress held deep in the inner recesses of the body. Often trauma, fear, panic attacks, and severe depression respond to the touch of a skilled body worker. Massage helps not only with the physical symptoms, but with the internal programming as well, relieving painful memories as well as painful muscles.

I was in a fairly bad car accident a few years ago. The three of us who were in the car were basically unharmed, but the car rolled several times and was crushed. The only injury was to my shoulder and a small bump on my head, but at the time it seemed hardly worth mentioning. We declined a ride in the ambulance to the local hospital, took a little Rescue Remedy, and decided a soak in a local hot tub was all that was needed to wash our aches and fears away.

Several weeks later my shoulder began aching severely, as much from the emotional stress of the accident, I think, as the injury to the muscle. I tried stretching, resting, moving, and

holding it, and finally I called my favorite massage therapists, Matthias and Andrea Reisen. Body workers for many years, these two expert therapists specialize in cranial sacral massage, a form of bodywork that moves energy through the body and helps unlock old memories and patterns experienced as blockages. Three sessions of cranial sacral work later — without the Reisens even touching it — my shoulder no longer held on to the trauma and was able to release whatever residual pain remained.

Movement and Exercise

Physical exercise is one of the best methods we have available to release the stress and tension of our minds and our bodies. Like massage therapy and bathing, exercise helps move the disorders and tension of the mind into physical matter, and from the physical body it is better able to release it as energy into the universe.

Movement and exercise assure a good flow of blood to all parts of the body. They help move energy out of our heads, where so much of our stress is stuck. Movement is an important and valuable part of any health protocol for NS disorders. When you find yourself facing life changes, emotional upheavals, or stress, be certain to increase your movement and exercise accordingly.

There are so many forms of exercise available today, from outdoor sports to TV aerobics, from yoga and gentle stretching to weight lifting at the local gym. Dancing, of course, in all its many forms is a great way to move and have fun doing it! There are suitable exercise programs for every body type, age,

and condition. Your responsibility is to find the type most suitable for your personal needs and to make the time in your life to enjoy the changes that begin to happen as you take care of those needs. Whatever form of exercise you decide on should be fun and enjoyable, not something that you *have* to do, but something you want to do. If you find yourself resisting the form of exercise you've selected, then find something else. The important thing to remember is that our bodies were designed not to sit all day but to move, dance, stretch, run, jump, play, and rejoice!

Reaping the Benefits of Outdoor Exercise

When I was going through the upheaval of divorce many years ago, I took up running. Each day I ran on the same woodland path, as the familiarity gave me some reassurance. Along with the physical benefits of running, I began to notice how much quieter my mind felt after the run. But the greatest benefit was making all those friends en route. I would pass the same plants, the same grand trees. I would stop each day and talk to a huge old yellow birch, telling it my troubles and how I was doing that day. Exercise helped, but Nature, my running partner, helped even more.

The Importance of Rest and Relaxation

Just as important as movement and exercise in NS disorders are appropriate amounts of rest and relaxation. As happens so often in our lives as we're buried under the stress of unbalanced living, we forget to care lovingly for ourselves. Some of the most basic human needs, such as a loving, supportive environment, good nutrition, exercise, rest, and relaxation, are sacrificed. We look for instant cures and remedies in the drugs that are available today and dig ourselves further into the pits of our despair. But remedies are more often found in the most basic and least expensive of lifestyle changes; these are the true "medicines" that create balance and harmony.

During periods of extreme tension or NS disorders, some people find they don't sleep well. When they are able to fall asleep, their sleep is restless and disturbed. For others the reverse is true; they fall into periods of deep sleep and never seem to wake up fully. Both problems stem from a similar NS imbalance, and both can be corrected with proper nutrition and natural herbal remedies. And correcting these sleep problems is important, because getting appropriate amounts of rest and relaxation is essential for NS health and balance.

Chemicals such as serotonin are produced only during particular times of sleep and are vital for mental function. The need for sleep is not so much to rest our bodies as it is to rest our minds. The body needs little more than two hours of sleep per day to function, but parts of the brain need seven to eight hours to be fully recharged and rested. There are simple but highly effective methods to ensure that we get more rest in times of stress. Above all, remember to:

Avoid staying up later than is healthy for you at night. We all have our own sleep patterns and rhythms. Some people can feel rested on five to six hours of sleep a night, while others need six to eight hours of sleep. But if you don't wake feeling rested in the morning and are chronically tired and depleted, try adding a couple more hours of sleep each evening. Turn off any lights in the room, especially LED lights, computer lights, and so on, which can disrupt sleep patterns. You also may wish to examine the discussion of insomnia (page 32) for specific suggestions on how to ensure deep, restful sleep.

Learn to say no to extra activities, especially those in the late evening. Though they may be fun and entertaining, many of those extra activities require the very energy you need to refuel and restore a depleted nervous system. Whenever something seems really important or necessary, ask yourself how much energy it will require. Remind yourself that what is most important in your life at this time is *feeling really good, rested, and vital*. I think often of the biblical story of Joseph and the coffers of grain he stored as an assurance against famine. This story is a reminder to me of the access we have to unlimited energy. But in order for that energy to be everlasting, we must not use it all up. We must replenish our energy by sleeping well, eating well, exercising, and striving to live a life of harmony and balance. Energy is like a savings account. We can draw on it when we have need, and so long as we replenish, there will always be plenty.

Flower Essences: Nature's Most Radiant Remedies

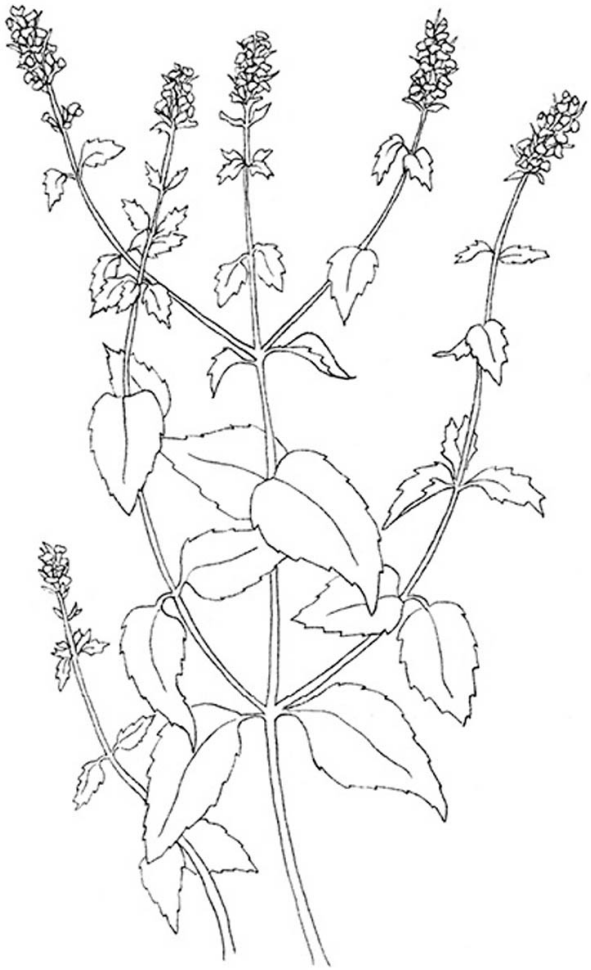
Flower essences were "discovered" and made popular by the work of Dr. Edward Bach. A prominent physician in England during the early 20th century, Bach became dissatisfied and disillusioned with the conventional healing modalities of modern medicine. Leaving his busy practice, he returned to the fields of his childhood to rest and renew. While there he discovered the healing power inherent in flowers. Devising a remarkably simple, safe, and effective system of healing from flowers, he treated all manner of illness by addressing the emotions behind the problems. The system is brilliant in its simplicity and humbling in its effectiveness. Though flower essences might possibly stretch your belief in the rational world, there are thousands of recorded cases of its effectiveness in treating physical ailments.

Since Dr. Bach's death in the early 1950s, many people have chosen to carry on his work with flower essences and have developed literally thousands of flower essences for all manner of disorders. But, always and foremost, the flowers address the spirit of the illness, the underlying cause, the emotional being.

Because I am most familiar with Dr. Bach's particular remedies, I continue to use them. However, I am convinced that those flower essences made from North American plants have a special affinity for people who live on this continent. No matter which flower essences you choose, be sure that they are ethically prepared. Flower essences are energetic medicines working on the powerful yet subtle vibrational levels of

healing; how the medicines are prepared is of utmost importance.

For trauma, anxiety, stress, and other NS disorders, there are a number of flower essences that are particularly valuable. You can find flower essences are available in natural foods stores across the country. (My friends Kate Gilday and Don Babineau of Woodland Essence make exquisite essences from endangered plants; see the resources for their contact information.) In fact, you can find flower essences in most countries in the world, a testament of their effectiveness. These liquid extracts can be used with any other system of healing or medication with no harmful side effects. You simply place a drop or two of the selected essence under your tongue several times a day. Flower essences are tasteless and odorless. They are absorbed instantly into the system and begin their healing work seconds after being ingested.



ABOVE: *Peppermint*

A Guide to Flower Essences

Flower Essence	Use
Aspen	Indicated for fear of the unknown, vague anxiety and apprehension, hidden fears, and nightmares
Gorse	Used for discouragement, hopelessness, and resignation
Hornbean	Indicated for fatigue and weariness, or when daily life is seen as an overwhelming burden
Impatiens	Recommended for impatience, irritation, tension, and intolerance
Mimulus	Used for known fears of everyday life and shyness
Mustard	Indicated for melancholy, gloom, despair, and general depression without obvious cause
Olive	Excellent for complete exhaustion after a long struggle
Rescue Remedy (also called Five-	The most famous of all the flower essences, this combination of five flowers

Flower Remedy)	is especially suited for trauma and stressful situations
Rock rose	Suggested for deep fear, terror, panic attacks, and fear of death or annihilation
Star of Bethlehem	Used for shock or trauma, either recent or from a past experience; also indicated for the need for comfort and reassurance from the spiritual world
Vervain	Recommended for nervous exhaustion from overstriving
White chestnut	Indicated for a worrisome, chattering mind
Wild rose	Indicated for resignation, lack of hope, or lingering illness

CHAPTER FOUR

The Herbal Home Medicine Chest

A number of herbs are remarkable in their ability to reduce stress, anxiety, and depression and directly benefit the nervous system. These herbs are generally referred to as herbal nervines. Unlike conventional medicines for NS disorders, which often deaden or block nerve response, nervine herbs often tone and are adaptogenic, aiding the body in adapting to the stresses of modern-day life. These herbs are also nutritive, benefiting not only our nervous system but the whole body/mind/spirit matrix. Rather than deadening or blocking our ability to receive, interpret, and respond to information, they help our sensory ability become more finely tuned and receptive.

The Nervine Categories

Any herb that has an effect on the nervous system is called an herbal nervine. However, herbs affect the nervous system in various ways. Some are stimulating, others calming, some cause muscle spasms to relax, others are pain relieving. The following categories are useful in helping to define the various actions herbs have on the nervous system. There is great overlap among these categories, with most herbs falling in more than one group. But the categorization does, at least, give some idea of how the herbs work. Understanding the major categories helps us determine which herb(s) to use for certain situations.

Nerve Tonics

Herbs that feed, tone, support, and strengthen the nervous system are called nerve tonics. These herbs fortify the nerve tissue directly and are usually noted for their high concentration of calcium, magnesium, B vitamins, and/or protein. Though very effective, most are mild in action and can be used over a long period of time without any adverse reaction. In fact, they're intended for use for a period of time. Herbs from this category are included in nearly every formula for NS disorders.

Examples of nerve tonics are ashwagandha, chamomile, hawthorn, lemon balm, linden flower, oats (green milky tops), eleuthero (Siberian ginseng), skullcap, valerian, and wood betony.

Nerve Sedatives

Herbal sedatives or calmatives, as they are sometimes referred to, act directly on the nervous system by helping to reduce pain, ease tension, and encourage sleep. Though they have "sedative-like" properties, unlike conventional allopathic sedative drugs, herbal sedatives soothe and nourish peripheral nerve endings and muscle tissue, rather than blocking nerve signals.

Sedative herbs are used to treat nervousness, anxiety, and sleeplessness. Among the nerve sedatives are the herbal antispasmodics (though they are often grouped separately). Herbal antispasmodics are extremely helpful for relieving muscle spasms, tics, and cramping by directly relaxing the large smooth muscles of the body.

Nerve sedatives include California poppy, catnip, chamomile, hops, kava, lavender, lemon balm, lobelia, passionflower, skullcap, St. John's wort, and valerian. Antispasmodics include cramp bark, lobelia, and valerian.

Nervine Stimulants

When we think of NS disorders, we generally assume that a relaxing, calming remedy is needed. When you're stressed, depressed, tired, and worn out, the last thing you need is another cup of coffee, a sugar-rich treat, or a strong stimulant to keep you going. But that's generally "the remedy" in modern-day American. When tired, keep going! But there are several excellent herbal stimulants or activators that are actually good for the nervous system. These gently stimulating herbs nourish and restore nerve function and help the body adapt to stress factors. Rather than using up the last reservoirs of energy and depleting our systems even further, they help us begin to restore and renew.

Herbal stimulants generally work by gently activating the nervous system and increasing circulation and blood flow to the peripheral nerve endings. They are nutrient dense (providing concentrated nutrition), enhance the ability of enzymes to transform glucose into energy, and enhance the overall activity of the endocrine and nervous systems. Many of the herbs in this category are antioxidant rich, limiting the production of damaging free radicals.

Nervine stimulants include eleuthero (Siberian ginseng), ginkgo, ginseng (*Panax ginseng*), gotu kola, holy basil (tulsi), peppermint, rhodiola, rosemary, and spearmint.

Important Herbal Nervines

The following herbs are all some form of herbal nervine. They work by reconnecting the nerve channels in the body, gently stimulating or “reawakening” them. Rather than deadening pain, which most herbs can’t do well, herbal nervines strengthen the nervous system so that it can better respond to stressors. In essence, herbal nervine therapy increases our ability to cope with the daily stress of life.

Ashwagandha

(*Withania somnifera*)

Parts used: Roots primarily, though the seeds, juice, and leaves are used as well

Benefits: An ancient Ayurvedic herb, ashwagandha is among the most widely used and respected herbs in India. It is often erroneously referred to as "Indian ginseng"; though not related to *Panax ginseng* in any way, it does have similar adaptogenic properties and is a tonic for the nervous system when used over a period of time. It is both energizing and calming. As an adaptogenic herb, ashwagandha increases the body's overall ability to deal with stress, anxiety, and depression. It promotes general well-being and enhances stamina, making it very popular with athletes. Ashwagandha is also considered a sexual tonic and is used in many reproductive and aphrodisiac formulas for men, though it's also equally helpful for women. It is especially useful for those sexual problems associated with nervous stress and debilitation and is often used by men in their elder years to increase sexual energy.

Recent scientific studies in India suggest that ashwagandha may help counteract the immune suppression associated with chemotherapy and radiation therapy. Ashwagandha seems to encourage stem cell growth, which increases white blood cell activity.

Suggested uses: Ashwagandha is indicated for reduced levels of energy, insomnia and sleep issues, general debilitation,

reduced sexual energy, tension, stress, and anxiety. It is an especially nourishing and tonifying herb for the nervous system and all symptoms of nerve stress. The powdered root is typically mixed with warm milk, cinnamon, and honey and served as an evening drink to encourage relaxation and aid in a deep and restful sleep (see **here**).

Preparation tips: Ashwagandha has a rather unusual flavor but mixes well with warm, spicy herbs such as ginger and cinnamon. Try blending it with your favorite chai blend, or take it in tincture or capsule form.

California poppy

(*Eschscholzia californica*)

Parts used: Seeds, flowers, and leaves

Benefits: This vibrant golden blossom, California's state flower, grows in abundance in the United States. A kissing cousin of the notorious opium poppy, *Eschscholzia* has similar sedative and narcotic properties but is much milder and nonaddictive. California poppy is quite gentle in its action and is excellent in establishing equilibrium and calming nerve stress and excitability.

Suggested uses: Poppy is very calming and is used for treating anxiety and hyperactive nervous systems (people who are always "wired" and overly excitable). It promotes deep sleep and also provides support for migraines and headaches. California poppy is especially recommended for children who have difficulty sleeping, are overly excitable, or are experiencing stress and anxiety. Juliette de Bairacli Levy, my mentor and world-renowned herbalist, suggested grinding the seeds into meal, mixing them with honey, and forming the paste into "cakes." She dried these cakes in the sunlight to enhance their effects and then fed them to children.

Preparation tips: The aerial part of the plant is used, including the leaves, flowers, and seeds. Gather the fresh plant just as the blossom opens. The seeds are best gathered after they are fully ripened and before the wind disperses them. To make a tea, pour 1 cup of boiling water over 1 teaspoon of the seeds, leaves,

and blossoms, cover tightly, and let steep for 20 minutes or overnight. Poppy can also be made into a tincture.

Catnip

(*Nepeta cataria*)

Parts used: Leaves and flowers

Benefits: This is another of those versatile wonder plants. Easy to grow, easy to prepare, and easy to use, catnip is safe as well as effective. A garden mint, it grows easily both in and out of the garden — that is, if you can keep your cats away long enough for it to get a head start. While it sends cats into spasms of orgasmic pleasure, it calms and sedates people, both young and old. It is especially valued as a safe, effective relaxant for babies and young children. Jethro Kloss, a famous herbal doctor and author of the herbal classic *Back to Eden*, stated, "If every mother had catnip herb on the shelf, it would save her many a sleepless night and her child much suffering."

Suggested uses: An excellent calming herb, catnip can be used for all manner of stress. It is particularly beneficial for lowering fevers and for the pain of teething or toothaches. Serve as a tea throughout the day to relieve teething pain. It is also a restorative digestive bitter and is used for indigestion, diarrhea, and colic. Give a couple drops of the tincture before meals to serve as a digestive aid. A few drops of the tincture before bedtime can help a fussy child sleep better. This is an excellent herb to help reduce fevers and can be used as both a tincture and an enema for this purpose.

Preparation tips: Catnip is quite bitter tasting, so it is often formulated with other more pleasant-tasting herbs such as

oats and lemon balm. The aerial parts of the plant are prepared as tea, tincture, and capsules.

Chamomile

(*Anthemis nobilis* and related species)

Parts used: Primarily the flowers, but the leaves are also useful

Benefits: You could not talk about the nervous system without mentioning chamomile. A small, beautiful, and gentle plant, chamomile has long been used as an everyday tea but is equally valued for its powerful medicinal properties. Chamomile demonstrates to us that gentle does not mean less effective. A favorite herb for children, chamomile has been used to treat children's colic, nervous stress, infections, and stomach disorders. Remember the story of Peter Rabbit? When little Peter returned from Farmer John's garden — an extremely stressful experience, considering he barely escaped with his life — his mother whipped him soundly, gave him a cup of chamomile tea, and sent him to bed.

Rich in azulene, an essential oil with anti-inflammatory properties, chamomile is effective for lowering fever and reducing inflammation. It also contains bitter compounds that aid and assist digestion. European hospitals often serve chamomile to patients with digestive woes.

Preparation tips: For tea, pour 1 quart of boiling water over 1 ounce of chamomile flowers and steep, covered tightly, for 10 to 20 minutes. Chamomile has a sweet flavor with slightly bitter aftertones. The longer the herb is left to steep, the more bitter it becomes, which is good if you're using it as a digestive bitter. Drink 3 to 4 cups daily, or as often as needed. This herb

has lasting effects if used over a period of time. It blends well with other nervine herbs and is excellent for infants and children.

A Versatile Plant

Pharmacological and clinical studies confirm what herbalists have long known: the common wayside plant known as chamomile is an important medication for the nervous system. One of the major constituents of chamomile is a volatile oil obtained by steam distillation from the flower. The oil, which is a beautiful azure blue, is called azulene. Azulene contains a whole complex of active principles that serve as anti-inflammatory and antipyretic agents. The medicinal action of chamomile is most obvious in three major areas: the nervous system, the immune system, and the digestive system.

Feverfew

(*Chrysanthemum parthenium* and *Tanacetum parthenium*)

Parts used: Leaves and flowers

Benefits: Feverfew is another plant that has long been used by herbalists but virtually ignored by modern medicine. Recent pharmacological studies have proven its effectiveness in alleviating migraine headaches, common headaches, inflammation, and stress-related tension. It is also used for allergies and hay fever. Parthenolide, an active ingredient in feverfew, controls chemicals in the body responsible for producing allergic reactions and migraines. It also inhibits the production of prostaglandins that are implicated in inflammation, swelling, and PMS.

Suggested uses: Feverfew is most effective when taken over a period of time (3 to 4 weeks or longer). Though it will help alleviate the pain of an active migraine, it is far more effective when used as a preventive, taken for a period of several weeks up to three months. Its action is similar to that of aspirin, with a stronger but slower effect. Some people have found that eating a fresh leaf or two a day directly from the garden prevents migraines.

Caution: Most people can take feverfew with no side effects; however, it does require some cautionary measures. Since one of feverfew's medicinal actions is to promote menstruation, it may stimulate the menstrual cycle and/or promote cramping,

heavy bleeding, and painful menstruation. It is *not* recommended for pregnant women or people taking anticoagulant drugs. When using feverfew for any length of time it is always recommended to take it in cycles, for example, 5 days on and 2 days off, or a cycle of 3 weeks on and 1 week off.

Preparation tips: Parthenolide is highly sensitive to heat and will be easily destroyed if feverfew is exposed to high heat in the drying or preparation process. Tinctures made from fresh plant material seem to be more effective than tinctures made from the dried herb. If the product you are using is not effective, try another brand. Or better yet, grow some plants and make your own fresh tincture. Feverfew is very easy to grow and generally thrives in a warm, sunny garden space. With these parameters in mind, feverfew is generally used as a fresh plant tincture or tea (or the leaves are eaten fresh, as noted earlier). I prefer blending feverfew with lavender, California poppy, and St. John's wort for an effective remedy for migraine relief.

For headache relief, make a tea by pouring 1 quart of boiling water over 1 ounce of feverfew flowers/leaves. Let steep for 20 minutes, covered tightly. Strain and drink ¼ cup every 30 minutes until the headache is gone. Or use a feverfew tincure: Dilute ¼ teaspoon in ½ cup warm water, or lemon balm tea, and drink every hour until the headache is cleared.

Ginkgo

(*Ginkgo biloba*)

Parts used: Leaves, fruits, and seeds

Benefits: This is certainly one of my favorite herbs, and judging by the number of ginkgo products out there, a great number of other people's as well. Though the fruits and seeds of ginkgo are also considered to have medicinal value, it is the fan-shaped leaves that are most often used. Historical evidence from China relating the use of the leaf to improve brain function and memory is supported by more than 40 years of clinical research in Europe and other countries.

Ginkgo works as a memory enhancer by increasing circulation and vasodilation in the cerebral region. Regular use of ginkgo improves mental stability, memory function, and mental vitality. It is also an effective remedy for vertigo, tinnitus, or ringing in the ear. It is one of the best circulatory herbs, promoting blood flow and oxygenation throughout the entire body. Ginkgo is also antioxidant rich and is useful against free radicals, substances that roam freely in the system, damaging cellular health and accelerating aging and age-related diseases. Ginkgo is a wonderful tonic herb for anyone over 45. Studies show that ginkgo can slow the process of early onset Alzheimer's and dementia. In fact, it may be one of the most effective herbs for slowing this debilitating disease.

Suggested uses: Used to increase circulation, to enhance memory, for tinnitus/ringing in the ears, and for its antioxidant-rich value, ginkgo is most effective when used over a period of 2 to 4 months. Though the effects of ginkgo are not sudden or dramatic, if taken over a period of time there is a noticeable increase of memory and vitality. Ginkgo works as a nutrient, not a drug, so it is necessary to be consistent and to use an adequate amount.

Preparation tips: You'll often find standardized ginkgo products on market shelves as well as well as "whole plant" capsules, tinctures, and tea. Some studies suggest that ginkgo doesn't break down in water, but while it's not as strong as in other preparations, I have found ginkgo tea to be effective if taken on a regular basis. As a tea for memory it blends well with gotu kola, peppermint, and rosemary. As a circulatory tea, blend it with hawthorn, linden flower, and lemon balm. For stress and anxiety, blend ginkgo with oats and nettle.

Herbal History

Ginkgo is the sole surviving species of a large genus of plants that first appeared 250 million years ago. In fact, there are fossil remains of ginkgo that date to the dinosaur era, more than 200 million years ago! An excellent “brain food” and memory enhancer, ginkgo perhaps works in part because it holds the memories of an entire species — indeed, an entire age — in the cellular makeup of its being.

Ginseng, American

(*Panax quinquefolius*)

Parts used: Roots, which should be at least 4 to 6 years old, and the older the the better (but older roots are more expensive)

Benefits: A prized plant native to the North American continent, American ginseng is becoming increasingly more difficult to find and is highly at risk in its native woodlands due to overharvesting and habitat destruction. Connoisseurs of ginseng consider *P. quinquefolius* to be among the most prized ginsengs in the world, and Asian practitioners often prefer it. Asian ginseng, or *Panax ginseng*, is considered to be warming and energizing, creating heat in the body. *P. quinquefolius*, on the other hand, is considered neutral and calming, cooling and soothing while at the same time energizing. It has similar tonic and adaptogenic effects as the Asian variety.

Suggested uses: American ginseng is a balancing tonic for the entire body. It helps restore energy if used over a period of time. It also aids in mental clarity and helps the body adapt to stress. Use it whenever you need to support and tone the nervous system, for general debilitation, and to relieve a feeling of being worn out or tired all the time. It is often used to treat anemia and other blood weaknesses. It is also used to tend to sexual dysfunction, especially when the dysfunction is due to exhaustion and stress.

Caution: It is important to verify where your ginseng roots come from. These plants are seriously at risk in their native

habitat. Use only organically cultivated or woods-grown ginseng (sometimes called “wood stimulated”). Do not use roots harvested from the wild.

Preparation tips: Prepare as tea, tincture, or capsules. It has a bittersweet flavor, which is good in tea. The fresh root can be sliced and chewed.

Ginseng, Asian

(*Panax* and related species)

Parts used: Roots, which should be at least 4 to 5 years old, and the older the better (but older roots are more expensive)

Benefits: Considered the king of all tonics, ginseng boasts one of the best reputations in the herbal kingdom. Its genus name, *Panax*, derives from the Greek word for "cure-all." It has long been considered a male tonic herb and aphrodisiac and has been used for all manner of male sexual dysfunction. Though traditionally used primarily by men, it's also very appropriate for women, especially those going through menopause who need a sense of grounding and inner strength. Ginseng is an excellent adaptogenic tonic and helps the body resist a wide spectrum of illnesses. When used over a period of time, ginseng revitalizes and restores energy.

Suggested uses: Ginseng rejuvenates the entire nervous system, regenerates frayed or overtaxed nerves, and discourages mood swings and depression. It restores sexual vitality and rebuilds and restores energy if used consistently. It is especially useful when you are feeling stressed, worn out, and "ungrounded."

Caution: Much of the *Panax* ginseng sold in the United States is of inferior quality and has been treated heavily with fungicides and pesticides. In one undercover operation, the USDA found more than 36 illegal toxic substances in roots harvested in Wisconsin. If the roots look large, overly plump, and whitish,

be suspicious of the quality of the root. Buy only from reputable sources, and, because ginseng is severely at risk in the wild, buy only organically cultivated roots. Save the wild varieties for future generations of herbalists and plant lovers.

Preparation tips: Ginseng can be prepared as tea, powder, tincture, and capsules. It has a fine bittersweet flavor and blends well with many other tonic nervine herbs. It's often mixed with ginger and cinnamon in a spicy chai-type blend. Many people enjoy chewing on the pleasant-tasting, bittersweet "seng root"; the fresh root makes a tasty treat when sliced and soaked for a week or longer in honey. Ginseng powder can be added to blender shakes or mixed with other powdered herbs, spices (such as cinnamon and ginger), and honey to make a delicious spread that can be put on toast or crackers or stirred into hot water for an instant tea.

Ginseng, Siberian

(*Eleutherococcus senticosus*)

Parts used: Roots and bark

Benefits: Eleutherococcus, also referred to as eleuthero and Siberian ginseng, has many of the same properties as its famous cousin, *Panax* ginseng. It too is a superior adaptogenic herb with an impressive range of health benefits. In fact, the term "adaptogenic" was coined during studies done to observe the effects of eleuthero. It is commonly used to build stamina and endurance and helps produce a state of nonspecific resistance against an underlying imbalance, regardless of the specific nature of the stressor. Siberian ginseng increases energy and is used to treat suppressed sexual energy due to exhaustion and adrenal depletion.

Suggested uses: For best results, use over a period of time — several weeks to a few months.

Preparation tips: Eleuthero can be used as a tea, tincture, capsules, and powders. Its flavor is rather inconspicuous, and it blends well with other tonic and adaptogenic herbs in tea. Powdered eleuthero can be mixed into blender shakes and other recipes. The roots are often an ingredient in wines and elixirs.

Which Ginseng Should I Use?

There are a number of ginsengs to choose from. They all have similar adaptogenic and tonic properties that strengthen and nourish the nervous system. But each type of ginseng also has slightly different properties. Generally I prefer using eleuthero (*Eleutherococcus senticosus*, also known as Siberian ginseng) to *Panax* varieties of ginseng. It has very similar properties but grows much more readily, is not endangered, and is less expensive. Though most of the eleuthero used in America is imported from Russia, it does grow readily in the northeastern part of the United States and Canada, suggesting possibilities for commercial cultivation on this continent.

Gotu kola

(*Centella asiatica*)

Parts used: Leaves

Benefits: This beautiful violet-like plant is native to tropical and subtropical regions of the world. Considered one of the best nerve tonics, gotu kola has been used successfully in the treatment of epilepsy, schizophrenic behavior, and Alzheimer's disease. It is especially recommended for memory loss and steadily boosts mental alertness and vitality by feeding and nourishing the brain. Gotu kola is also an excellent stimulating nervine and is used in formulas for nervous stress and debility.

Most of the gotu kola available commercially is of very poor quality. Buy organically grown gotu kola when possible, and if possible, grow your own gotu kola. It grows easily in the warmer areas of the United States, and in colder northern regions it can be grown in pots indoors or in greenhouses for a fresh supply of the tasty little leaves.

Suggested uses: A favorite remedy for memory and brain function combines gotu kola in a tincture with ginkgo, rosemary, and peppermint. To be effective, it has to be used consistently for 3 to 4 weeks. Don't expect to wake up one morning feeling like Einstein. Rather, you may experience a subtle but noticeable increase in memory function and alertness.

Preparation tips: Gotu kola is effective as a tea, in tinctures, and as a fresh green added to salads and soups. It has a pleasant leafy taste.

Hawthorn

(*Crataegus* species)

Parts used: Leaves, flowers, berries, and the tips of branches

Benefits: Hawthorn has a long history of use for toning and strengthening the heart and circulatory system. It is a popular heart tonic in Europe. Though not often mentioned in the literature, hawthorn is also a wonderful remedy for "broken hearts" and for depression and anxiety. It is a specific medicine for those who have a difficult time expressing their feelings or who suppress their emotions. Hawthorn helps the heart to flower, to open and be healed.

Suggested uses: A tonic and adaptogenic herb, hawthorn is most effective when used over a period of several weeks or months. As a heart tonic it is often prepared as tea, as tincture, or in jams and jellies. It seems to embrace the heart and is used for emotional support as well as for the physical symptoms of heart distress. It is a calming, relaxing herb that is also rich in antioxidants.

Caution: Hawthorn is generally considered safe to use in conjunction with heart medication; it is more foodlike (nutritive) than druglike in its actions. However, if you are taking heart medication, consult with a holistic health care provider before taking hawthorn.

Preparation tips: In Europe, where hawthorn is a revered and common medicine, hawthorn berries are often prepared as

jam, which is delicious and readily available in grocery stores as well as pharmacies. Hawthorn berries also make a delicious tea and are often combined with lemon balm and oats for hypertension. The berries, leaves, and flowers are excellent combined with ginkgo leaves as a vascular tonic. For the treatment of high blood pressure, try combining hawthorn with yarrow and motherwort. Hawthorn is also effective in capsules, though it tastes so good I would suggest more tasty herbal preparations when using it. It also makes a good tincture, but again the flavor can be utilized to make elixir and liqueur blends that are exquisite tasting and yet contain all of the nourishing benefits of the plant.

Hops

(*Humulus lupulus*)

Parts used: Strobiles (the leaf bracts surrounding the tiny flowers) and pollen

Benefits: Where I grew up in the beautiful hills of Northern California, there were old hop orchards with hop vines still strangling fence posts and climbing nearly to the top of the telephone poles. Hops is a beautiful and aggressive plant laden with gold-dusted strobiles that blossom in the late summer and hang in clusters from a golden-green vine. It is these strobiles that contain the inconspicuous tiny green flowers and the golden pollen grains that are the medicinal parts of the plant. Rich in lupulin, volatile oils, resins, and bitters, hops is a potent medicinal herb highly valued for its sedative properties and relaxing effect on the nervous system. It is especially useful for hypertension and eases tension and anxiety. Hops is a powerful bitter, one of our most potent, and is excellent as a digestive bitter. It's especially useful for indigestion due to nervous energy and anxiety, and it is among the most popular remedies for insomnia.

Suggested uses: A tincture of equal parts hops and valerian is an effective remedy for insomnia and restless sleep. Take ½ to 1 teaspoon a couple of hours before bed, and then again at bedtime. Keep the tincture bottle by the bedside. If you wake up in the middle of the night, take another dose. Both hops and valerian are very bitter and pungent, and most people find their flavor unpleasant, so try diluting the tincture in a small

amount of warm water, tea, or juice. To use hops tincture as a digestive bitter, take it before and after meals. You might mix it with other bitter herbs such as mugwort, motherwort, artichoke leaf, and lemon peel and add a small amount of water to make it more palatable.

Caution: Because hops is a very strong sedative and has depressing actions on the body, it's generally not recommended for people suffering from depression.

Preparation tips: Hops is extremely bitter and nothing really disguises the taste well, so it's not recommended as a tea unless you have a penchant for bitter foods. Generally, hops is either tinctured or encapsulated. It is also a fine medicine when made into beer and is quite sedative and relaxing. Try growing your own hops vines and make your own homebrew. It can be quite aggressive once it gets going, so choose a long-term spot for it in the garden where it will get plenty of sunshine, and have a pole or arbor for it to grow on.

Kava-kava

(*Piper methysticum*)

Parts used: Roots

Benefits: Kava is native to the warm tropical regions of the world, particularly Polynesia, Melanesia, and Micronesia. Though highly revered for hundreds of years in its native culture as a medicinal and ceremonial herb, kava only recently has become popular in the West. But in a few short years it has climbed to the top of the popularity chart. I have seen ads for it in newspapers, heard people talking about it in drugstores, and have been to more than one party where the beverage of choice was kava. Considering its effects on the body, it's no wonder kava has become so popular. With nervous system disorders on the rise, I consider it an "herb for our time." Kava can be supremely helpful for those who feel stressed and anxious. An old saying goes, "Where kava is, the heart opens and there is only love." Kava was used traditionally to soothe arguments and bring peace between individuals and communities. I think we need to serve it in the White House.

Suggested uses: Kava has the unique ability to relax the body while awakening the mind. It produces a sense of relaxation, reducing tension, anxiety, and stress, and at the same time heightens awareness and mental acuity. Rather than blocking neurotransmitters, kava (via kavalactones, its active chemical constituents) relaxes muscles and tones nerve endings. It also has analgesic (pain-relieving) properties.

For those who fear driving or flying, kava is great to take before a trip. I generally take a few drops of kava tincture before speaking in public, as it relaxes my body and "brightens my mind." It certainly loosens my tongue and makes speaking easier!

Caution: In the regions where it traditionally grows, kava is considered a sacred herb and is used primarily in feasts and celebrations. When overused (that is, drinking it to the point of intoxication), kava can cause nausea, muscle weakness, and even loss of consciousness. For these reasons, do not drive after drinking a lot of kava; it would be like driving drunk. In addition, some studies have reported that kava can be toxic to the liver and cause skin disorders, but again, that is only when it is used in large amounts over long periods of time. Be respectful of the power of this herb. When used judiciously, it is a wonderful and safe relaxant and stress reliever.

Preparation tips: Kava is available as tincture, extract, and capsules. The tincture is helpful in times of stress when you need a quick relaxant, something that helps put the world in perspective. Capsules are effective for long-term stress and anxiety. Kava has a unique flavor that may take getting used to. Don't be alarmed the first time you try it; it will numb your tongue and create tingling sensations throughout the mouth. These sensations are temporary and are caused by the kavalactones.

I often serve kava chai at conferences and classes as a way of opening the heart and relaxing the body. To make it, mix kava with cinnamon, ginger, and a small amount of

cardamom. Other tonic nervine herbs, such as Siberian ginseng, can be added as well. Simmer over low heat for an hour or two. For each quart of tea, add 1 cup coconut milk. Let the mixture sit for several hours or overnight, then strain out the herbs and discard. Add honey to taste. Drink hot or cold. Serve this “punch” at your next family get-together; it definitely seems to elevate the spirits and brighten the mood.

Lavender

(*Lavandula officinalis*, *L. angustifolia*, and related species)

Parts used: Flowers and leaves

Benefits: Lavender is deeply relaxing and calming while also uplifting and strengthening to the spirit. It has long been used as an antidepressant and is helpful in dispelling depression and melancholy. It is one of the best herbs to use in herbal baths to relieve tension, stress, headaches, and insomnia. Used traditionally to imbue courage and strength, lavender is still a favorite herb to strengthen the heart and mind during stressful situations. In ancient Greek and Roman times, lavender was the herb of choice for women in labor. They would hold sprigs of lavender in their hands to squeeze during labor pains, as it was said to calm and strengthen them — and if lavender can ease the pain of childbirth, it can ease the pain of anything.

Suggested uses: After a long, stressful day, try a lavender bath, with a few drops of lavender essential oil, or 1 to 2 ounces of dried lavender tied up in a muslin bag, added to the bathwater. Don't have time for a bath? Then rub a few drops of lavender essential oil on your fingertips and massage the nape of your neck, your head, and your feet for calming relief.

Lavender's effectiveness as an antibacterial, antifungal, and antiseptic agent has been confirmed by numerous clinical studies. It is useful in treating a host of infections, including staph, strep, colds, and flus. Alone or in a combination with tea

tree oil, it can be applied directly to the skin to treat fungal infections such as ringworm and nail fungus, or it can be formulated in a douche to treat yeast infections. It is legendary as an herbal antiseptic and can be used to disinfect and heal scrapes, wounds, and burns. Mixed with St. John's wort, milky oats, and lemon balm, it makes an effective tea or tincture for grief and depression. Mixed with passionflower and skullcap, it makes an excellent remedy for sleeplessness and restless sleep.

Preparation tips: Lavender can be prepared as tincture, tea, baths, and salves. It is excellent in baths, including hand and foot baths; just add a few drops of the essential oil or a handful of the dried herb tied up in a muslin bag (like a large teabag) to the bathwater. It is also often sewn up in small bags that can be used as dream pillows or to disinfect and scent clothes drawers.

Lemon balm

(*Melissa officinalis*)

Parts used: Leaves and flowers

Benefits: A fragrant and beautiful member of the mint family, lemon balm not only is a gentle and effective nerve tonic but also tastes delicious. You can blend lemon balm with those not-so-good-tasting nervine herbs for a more pleasant-tasting blend. When crushed, the leaves of this plant smell like lemons. It is one of those powerful yet gentle herbs that is both delicious and effective medicine. It's also an easy-to-grow perennial, returning yearly to entice bees and butterflies to your garden. Both bees and beekeepers love this plant!

Suggested uses: The leaves and flowers contain volatile oils, tannins, and bitters that have a definite relaxing effect on the stomach and nervous system. Its overall medicinal effect is calming, relaxing, and mildly antispasmodic. It also has strong antiviral properties and is often used to treat viral infections such as herpes and shingles. It is excellent for stomach distress and general exhaustion. For a delicious nervine tonic, blend with chamomile and the milky green tops of oats. One of my favorite remedies for grief and heartache is a blend made of lemon balm, hawthorn, milky oat tops, and St. John's wort.

Preparation tips: Lemon balm is delicious and is often served as a tea, and can also be used to flavor less tasty herbs. To make tea, pour 1 quart of boiling water over 1 ounce of lemon balm. Let steep, covered tightly, for 20 minutes or overnight. Strain

and drink 4 cups daily, or as often as you need it. Lemon balm also makes a tasty tincture, and it can be encapsulated. It is also delicious when added to salads or blended fruit drinks.

Licorice

(*Glycyrrhiza glabra*)

Parts used: Roots

Benefits: This sweet root is an outstanding tonic for the endocrine system and a specific remedy for adrenal exhaustion, which often is the underlying cause of depression and lack of vitality. What is often termed a “midlife crisis” is often closely associated with adrenal exhaustion. Licorice supports the adrenals and will revitalize them if used over a period of weeks or months. It has a soothing mucilaginous consistency, which is often healing to sore mucous membranes in the throat, lungs, digestive system, and colon; it’s useful for treating sore throats, coughs, colds, ulcers, and stomach inflammation. It has potent antiviral properties and is often used alone or combined with lemon balm for treating herpes, shingles, and other viral infections.

Suggested uses: Licorice is often combined with other herbs because of its sweet taste. For adrenal exhaustion, tiredness, and fatigue, drink 2 to 3 cups of licorice tea a day, blended with other endocrine tonic herbs such as wild yam, sarsaparilla, burdock root, and sassafras. For sore throats, prepare licorice as a cough syrup; combine it with pleurisy root and elecampane for deep-seated bronchial inflammation, and combine it with marsh mallow root for digestive inflammation and ulcers. Licorice can be used in tinctures and capsules, but because of its sweet flavor and soothing mucilaginous consistency, it really shines in teas and syrups.

Caution: While generally considered safe — safe enough to use even for children — licorice is not recommended for individuals who have high blood pressure and/or suffer from water retention. People who are taking heart medication should check with their health care professional before using licorice root.

Preparation tips: Because licorice is so very sweet, it can be used in formulas to help "harmonize" or balance the flavors and effects of harsher, less pleasant herbs. It is excellent in powdered form, mixed with honey to make cough syrups and throat lozenges.

Nettle

(*Urtica dioica*)

Parts used: Leaves, seeds, and roots

Benefits: This is the stinging nettle that farmers despise, hikers hate, and children learn to deplore. But herbalists around the world fall at the feet of this "green goddess" herb. For many, it's one of their favorite herbs. What's so special about this prickly, weedy, somewhat inconspicuous plant? It is a vitamin supplement better than most vitamin pills you can buy. Rich in iron, calcium, potassium, silicon, magnesium, manganese, zinc, and chromium, as well as a host of other vitamins and minerals, nettle activates metabolism by strengthening and toning the entire system. It is a wonderful tonic for the endocrine and reproductive systems.

Suggested uses: Nettle is indicated for liver problems, allergies, and hay fever. Because of its high calcium content, it is calming and soothing to the nervous system and is used in formulas for stress and anxiety. For the nervous system it combines well as a tea with lemon balm, oats, and chamomile. Nettle roots are an excellent tonic for men and are used to treat prostatitis. Ryan Drum, herbalist and wildcrafter extraordinaire, suggests that the seeds are among the best and most nourishing of herbal stimulants. All this and it tastes good too!

Preparation tips: Nettle has a rich green flavor and lends itself well to tea blends, though it's also sometimes prepared as

tincture and capsules. Because of its nutrient density, it is included in many herbal formulas for the nervous, reproductive, digestive, and urinary systems. Combine nettle with green milky oats and raspberry leaf to help with reduced energy and sexual dysfunction.

Nettle is most often served as tea, but it's delicious steamed and served as a green. Try it in place of spinach in spanakopita (Greek spinach pie) or steamed with feta cheese and olive oil. You must make sure, however, that the nettle has been thoroughly cooked or you'll get pricked while eating it. If you have a good stand of nettles nearby, it is good practice to trim them constantly throughout the season. They will keep producing those tasty tops until fall.

Oats

(*Avena sativa* [cultivated] and *A. fatua* [wild])

Parts used: Green milky tops, seeds, and stalks

Benefits: Oats are among the best nutrient tonic herbs for the nervous system and are also an excellent cardiac tonic. While the entire aerial part of the oat plant is considered useful, it is generally the green milky oat top, harvested before it has ripened, that is used in herbal preparations. Those milky green tops are rich in silicon, calcium, chromium, and magnesium. The ripened dried oats — used in making oatmeal — are also soothing and nutritious. Oats contains several active alkaloids, including trigonelline and gramine (found also in barley and passionflower), as well as starch and B vitamins. The stalks of oats, though not as rich in minerals as the milky green tops, are also medicinal.

Suggested uses: Both milky green oats and dried oats are indicated for stress and anxiety and are soothing to irritated, inflamed nerve endings. They are frequently used for treating NS disorders, depression and anxiety, low vitality, irritability, and urinary incontinence. Oats provide energy by increasing overall health and vitality. They are one of the principal herbal aids for convalescence after an illness, as they are soothing, nutritious, and easy to digest. They are also often used to ease the symptoms of nicotine and other chemical withdrawals.

Preparation tips: The ripened oats are used as a cereal grain and make one of the most popular breakfast foods in the world. Oats make a delicious, nutritive tea and can be combined with lemon balm and passionflower for a good nervine tonic. Blend with valerian for a sleep aid. Combine oats with digestive bitters for any liver or digestive upset. And, finally, oats (both dried oats and the milky green tops) make one of the most soothing herbal baths for nervous stress and irritated or itchy skin. Add several drops of lavender essential oil to your oatmeal bath for an especially soothing, relaxing experience.

Passionflower

(*Passiflora incarnata*)

Parts used: Leaves and flowers

Benefits: Contrary to what its name seems to imply, passionflower is a calming, relaxing herb, not one that excites passion and Eros. It has a long history of use in South America, where it was used to treat epilepsy, anxiety, insomnia, and panic attacks. A gentle but highly effective herb, rich in flavonoids and alkaloids that help regulate neurotransmitters, it is still valued for its use in treating imbalances of the nervous system. Passionflower helps reduce tension and anxiety, calms the central nervous system, and may help lower blood pressure that's elevated due to stress. You often find it in formulas for insomnia and restless sleep and for people with a tendency toward anxiety and agoraphobia. It is useful for children as well as adults. It also has analgesic and antispasmodic properties and can be used for headaches, menstrual cramps and pain, and spastic muscles.

Suggested uses: This plant is well known for its sleep-inducing properties and is often combined with skullcap and/or valerian for this purpose. It is one of the best herbs for anxiety and depression and can be effectively combined with oats and St. John's wort. Use the tincture at bedtime to aid in deep, restful sleep.

Preparation tips: Use the leaves and flowers in tea blends, tinctures, and capsules.

Rhodiola

(*Rhodiola rosea*)

Parts used: Roots

Benefits: This amazing adaptogenic herb thrives in the cold northern regions of the world, from Siberia and northern Canada to Tibet. Though it's a small succulent that looks quite delicate, it is able to survive the toughest climates and seems to impart its tenacity to those who use it. Rhodiola has a long history of use as an adaptogen and tonic. Early records of its use go back to the Vikings, who used it to enhance physical endurance as well as mental clarity. It seems to have been used for similar purposes in every region where it grows. Siberians used it to enhance immunity and prevent illness; Tibetans used it to boost circulation and increase energy; and the Chinese used it to extend life span and enhance sexual vitality. Modern-day research seems to validate what our ancestors knew, confirming the adaptogenic and energy-enhancing properties of this amazing little plant.

Though it's only recently been introduced into North America, many herbalists, including myself, consider rhodiola to be one of the best energizing and adaptogenic tonics for the endocrine and nervous systems. Most of the rhodiola available in the United States is imported from Russia and Mongolia, but it does grow well in the northern regions of the country, and I hope that we'll soon be seeing some U.S.-grown rhodiola on the market.

Suggested uses: Rhodiola is one of the best herbs to treat a general state of depletion, lack of energy, and depression. It helps restore and rebuild energy and can be combined with other adaptogenic and tonic herbs to help rebuild and replenish the nervous system. It can help rebuild and restore a depleted immune system and is especially helpful after long-term illness or during recovery from trauma. For people suffering from Lyme disease, I've found rhodiola to be helpful in providing energy and stamina without depleting the system. It is excellent for altitude sickness, especially when combined with reishi mushroom. David Winston and Stephen Maimes, in their excellent book *Adaptogens: Herbs for Strength, Stamina, and Stress Relief,* mention using rhodiola to treat hyperactivity and attention deficit disorders, as well as head injuries. My friend and fellow herbalist Pam Montgomery shared with me how rhodiola was the only thing that helped her with the insomnia she was experiencing as a result of menopause. I have since recommended rhodiola to several menopausal women, all with similar positive results.

Preparation tips: Though the flavor of rhodiola is fine, it is very astringent. In order to be palatable as a tea, the herb is best mixed with other herbs. I often blend it with licorice root, Siberian ginseng (eleuthero), ginger, and cinnamon. Rhodiola is also commonly used in tincture and capsule form. I also purchase powdered rhodiola and mix it with other powdered adaptogenic herbs to make delicious "candy" balls. Start with a lower dose (100 to 200 mg), and increase if needed. When you first start taking rhodiola, it's best to take it in the morning, to be sure it doesn't keep you awake at night.

St. John's wort

(*Hypericum perforatum* and related species)

Parts used: Flowers and leaves (approximately 70 percent flowers to 30 percent leaves)

Benefits: In the 1990s St. John's wort became, quite possibly, the number one herb used to treat depression and anxiety — the "happy herb" of the decade. A classic herb for nerve damage and depression, St. John's wort has been used for centuries and held in high esteem by herbalists throughout western Europe and the Mediterranean. It is primarily valued as a remedy for damaged nerve endings such as in burns, neuralgia, wounds, bruises, and other trauma to the skin. It is also often used to relieve stress, mild depression and anxiety, seasonal affective disorder, fibromyalgia, and chronic fatigue.

Exactly how St. John's wort works is not clearly understood, nor have the active chemical constituents responsible for its antidepressant activities been clearly identified. Early speculation targeted St. John's wort as a monoamine oxidase (MAO) inhibitor, but recent studies have rejected this premise. Hypericin is sometimes claimed to be the herb's primary active constituent. But again, scientists aren't in agreement, and the information is often conflicting. In my opinion, we should look to the whole wonder of this plant, rather than isolated constituents.

Suggested uses: Although St. John's wort is effective for depression, it is best used for mild cases, rather than serious or long-standing depression, and also works best when used in conjunction with other holistic supportive therapies that include counseling, massage therapy, and foods that nourish the nervous system. St. John's wort combines well with other herbs and is often mixed with hops and valerian for insomnia, with lavender and lemon balm for depression, and with chamomile for children and young people going through emotional upheaval. I frequently combine it with passionflower *(Passiflora incarnata)* for anxiety and stress.

People often ask if they can take St. John's wort in conjunction with prescription or over-the-counter antidepressants, with the hope of being able to decrease or eliminate those drugs altogether. Of course it depends on the individual situation, but generally, if a person is not suicidal and doesn't have chronic clinical depression, St. John's wort can serve as an effective transitional herb — but again, it is often most effective when combined with other supportive therapies. Because prescription antidepressants block nerve responses and St. John's wort, as a nerve tonic, builds and strengthens the nervous system, they don't interfere with each other and create greater possibilities for healing when used together. It is important, however, that you work closely with an experienced holistic health care practitioner if you intend to use these medications simultaneously.

Caution: Though some people claim that St. John's wort causes sensitivity to the sun and skin rashes in susceptible

individuals, others find it to be a helpful sunscreen. Just be mindful when using St. John's wort in the sunshine, and if you get a rash, discontinue its use.

There was some earlier concern that St. John's wort worked similarly to Prozac as an MAO inhibitor, but recent studies have proven this theory to be false. Therefore, the restrictions imposed on MAO-inhibiting antidepressants don't apply to St. John's wort.

Preparation tips: The flowers and leaves are used in tinctures, oil, capsules, and tea. The beautiful red oil made magically from the cheerful yellow flowers is wonderful "trauma" oil and can be used for bruises, sprains, burns, and injuries of all kinds. It's a joy to behold and a joy to prepare. To make the oil, infuse freshly opened flowers and leaves (70 percent flowers to 30 percent leaves) in olive oil for two weeks.

Skullcap

(*Scutellaria lateriflora*)

Parts used: Leaves

Benefits: This lovely, shy member of the mint family is found growing in shady areas near streams and meadows in the mountains. It's somewhat inconspicuous; you may have to search to find it. Thankfully, it is readily available in most herb stores, as it is highly regarded for its nervine properties.

Suggested uses: Early herbalists and doctors in the United States considered skullcap one of the most important medicines for nervous system disorders and used it to treat such serious imbalances as epilepsy and convulsions. A versatile and popular herb for the nervous system, skullcap today is indicated for headaches, nerve tremors, stress, menstrual tension or cramps, insomnia, and nervous exhaustion. It's especially recommended for people with "overactive" brains — that is, those who can't relax because their mind keeps turning, who are unable to fall asleep because they can't stop thinking or worrying, or who are under a lot of mental stress. To aid those who have trouble sleeping, mix skullcap with milky oats and/or passionflower. For menstrual tension or cramps, mix it with raspberry leaf and nettle leaf.

Preparation tips: Skullcap is used in tea, tincture, and capsule form. Though a strong, effective herb, there is no danger of overdose or cumulative buildup if used over a long period of time. Quite the contrary; to receive the full benefit of skullcap

it is recommended that you use it over an extended period of time and in adequate dosages. The recommended adult dose is 2 to 3 cups of tea daily, or ½ to 1 teaspoon of tincture, diluted in ½ cup warm water, three times daily.

To make tea, use 1 teaspoon of the herb per cup of water. Bring the water to a boil, pour over the herb, cover, and let steep (do *not* boil the herb) for 20 minutes.

Valerian

(*Valeriana officinalis* and related species)

Parts used: Roots

Benefits: One of the most potent herbs for the nervous system, valerian is powerful and very effective. Though potent, it is perfectly safe and is non-habit-forming. Scientific studies show that valerian works by depressing activity in the brain and spinal cord. Valerian is the herb of choice for many people for treating stress, insomnia, and nervous system disorders. It is effective both as a long-term nerve tonic and as a remedy for acute problems such as headaches, cramps, muscle spasms, and pain. It is one of the best herbs for relieving insomnia and restless sleep. It also relaxes the smooth muscles of the uterus, colon, and bronchial passages. It has powerful tonic effects on the heart and is often recommended in combination with hawthorn berries for high blood pressure and irregular heartbeat.

Suggested uses: Some herbalists prefer the fresh, violet-scented roots; others claim the medicinal properties are stronger in the dried roots, which smell like dirty socks — or worse — and are not everyone's "favorite cup of tea." Whether used fresh or dried seems to be a personal preference.

Don't be afraid to take adequate amounts of this herb. Begin with low dosages and increase until you feel its relaxing effects. If you happen to take too much valerian, you may experience a rubbery-like or heavy feeling in your muscles.

This passes quickly. Cut back the dosage so that you feel relaxed but alert.

Caution: Generally considered a safe, nontoxic herb, valerian can act as an irritant for some people. If you become further agitated and restless after using valerian, discontinue use and consider yourself in the rare 10 percent of the population that shouldn't use this herb.

Preparation tips: Valerian can be taken as tea, tincture, or capsules. Because the roots are rich in aromatic oils, they should be infused (steeped) in hot water rather than decocted (boiled). Use 1 to 2 ounces of valerian root per quart of water. Pour boiling water over the root, cover tightly, and let the infusion sit overnight, or at least 45 minutes. Strain; drink 4 cups daily. If you're using a tincture, take 1 to 2 teaspoons diluted in warm water or tea three times daily, or as often as needed. It is difficult, if not impossible, to mask the flavor of valerian. My suggestion is to just get used to it!

ABOVE: *Valerian*

CHAPTER FIVE

Making and Using Herbal Remedies

Preparing and using your own herbal remedies is a simple art that's quite easy to learn and fun to do. In fact, people have been doing this very thing for centuries. You'll find simple instructions in this chapter. You can learn more about herbal preparations in my book *Rosemary Gladstar's Medicinal Herbs: A Beginner's Guide*. However, if making herbal remedies is not your cup of tea, don't despair. You can easily find high-quality herbal products in many natural food stores and herb shops, and also online. (For suggested companies, see the resources at the end of this book.)

If you are going to make your own remedies, the quality of the herbs you use is important. Buy herbs from local growers or from reputable herb or natural foods stores. Better yet, grow your own. With a little practice, you can learn how to tell whether herbs are of good quality by their color, taste, scent, and effect. Use the same standards you'd use when shopping for vegetables and fruits. Even dried herbs should look lively and colorful and retain their fragrance (they may not necessarily smell good, but they should be scented). If an herbal remedy is not effective, it probably is either because the herbs were of poor quality or because the dosage wasn't correct for the individual.

Determining Dosage

Guidelines for determining correct dosages are provided **here**. However, deciding the proper dosage of herbs for an individual is not an exact science. As individuals, we respond somewhat differently to herbs and treatments. Even in

conventional/allopathic medicine, drug dosage is far more arbitrary than we're led to believe. Herbalists are, perhaps, quicker to admit that determining dosage for each individual involves some skill, experience, and also a healthy touch of "inner knowing" and observation. When you're using herbs, as opposed to pharmaceutical drugs, you don't generally have to be as concerned about "overdosing," as most herbs in common use are safe and nontoxic. (Though certainly there are some extremely toxic herbs, and others that need to be used with caution, all the herbs mentioned in this book are safe and nontoxic.)

To determine the proper dosage, there are a few considerations to evaluate:

- **Consider the herb.** What is its primary action? Is it generally regarded as safe and nontoxic? Does it have any safety issues? How is it traditionally used? It's always wise, when possible, to do a little research on each herb before using it.
- **Consider the individual and his or her constitution.** Is this person relatively healthy? Robust or sensitive? Weak or debilitated? Does he or she get sick often or only occasionally?
- **Consider the illness, imbalance, or health issue.** What symptoms manifest? What is the root or underlying cause? Is the condition chronic or acute? Short or long term? Inflammatory? Does it manifest as hot, cold, or both?

Taking these factors into account will help you determine a more accurate dosage. Ultimately, when determining the correct amount of herbs to take, you must trust the wisdom of

the body; listen to what it's telling you; and when in doubt, ask the plants. They often give the best advice.

If you're unsure about the dosage, use the charts on the following pages as guidelines.

Dosage Chart

Chronic problems are long-term imbalances such as PMS, chronic back pain, migraines, arthritis, and allergies. They usually develop slowly over a period of weeks or months and generally require a long-term commitment to correct the imbalance. Chronic problems can flare up and manifest acute symptoms, but the underlying problem is long-standing.

Acute problems come on suddenly, reach a crisis quickly, and need immediate response. Examples of acute problems include toothaches, headaches, menstrual cramps, and burns. Pain is often an acute symptom, though it can be caused by either an acute or a chronic problem.

PREPARATION	DOSAGE FOR CHRONIC CONDITIONS	DOSAGE FOR ACUTE CONDITIONS
Tea	3–4 cups daily for 5 days, rest for 2 days, then repeat for several weeks, or until the problem is corrected	¼–½ cup throughout the day, up to 3–4 cups, until symptoms subside
Extracts or tinctures*	½–1 teaspoon 3 times daily for 5 days, rest for 2 days, then continue for several weeks, or until the problem is corrected	¼–½ teaspoon every 30–60 minutes until symptoms subside
Capsules or tablets	2 capsules/tablets 3 times daily for 5 days, rest for 2 days, then continue for several weeks, or until the problem is corrected	1 capsule/tablet every hour until symptoms subside

*Includes syrups and elixirs.

Note: Though it's not necessary to follow an exact cycle of 5 days on, 2 days off when using herbs, everything in nature follows a pattern or cycle. I've found that it's better not to use herbs every day, not because they are toxic or will overload the body, but because it allows for a natural cycle of rest and renewal. Some herbalists follow a cycle of 3 weeks taking an herbal remedy, with 1 week off.

How to Determine Measurements

While many people are converting to the metric system, I've reverted to the simpler's method of measuring. Many herbalists choose to use this system because it is effective, simple, and versatile. Throughout this book measurements are referred to as "parts": 3 parts passionflower, 1 part lemon balm, 2 parts milky oat tops. A "part" is any unit of measurement you want it to be: cups, ounces, pounds, tablespoons, or teaspoons. You'll use the same unit of measurement for each "part" in a recipe. The "part" measurement determines the ratio of ingredients in a recipe, and it allows you to make each recipe in the amount you need.

Sample Formula Blended in the Simpler's Method

PARTS	PARTS IN TABLESPOONS	PARTS IN TEASPOONS
3 parts passionflower	3 tablespoons passionflower	3 teaspoons passionflower
2 parts milky oat tops	2 tablespoons milky oat tops	2 teaspoons milky oat tops
1 part lemon balm	1 tablespoon lemon balm	1 teaspoon lemon balm

Medicinal Herbal Tea

Tinctures and tablets/capsules are often preferred these days because they're easy to take. Though I appreciate these preparations, I prefer and recommend herbal teas as part of every health protocol. Why? Not only is water a "user-friendly" solvent that extracts most of the healthy constituents from the plants, but drinking herbal tea reminds us to take an active part in our health and well-being. The very act of preparing tea involves us in the healing process. Tea is warming and soothing to the soul. It is as ancient as time itself and captures the essence of fire, water, earth, and plant life. When we brew a cup of tea, we perform an act of alchemy, the mixing and brewing of the elemental forces.

There are several methods used to brew herbal tea.

Method I: Infusion

Leaves, flowers, and other plant parts rich in aromatic oils require only infusing or steeping, as boiling them would cause the rapid loss of their healing constituents. To make an infusion, boil 1 quart of water for each ounce of herb (or 1 cup of water to 1 tablespoon of herb), pour the water over the herbs, and let steep for approximately 30 to 60 minutes. To make a really strong medicinal blend, let the tea steep for several hours or even overnight. The more herb you use and the longer it's steeped, the stronger the brew. Let your taste buds guide you.

Method II: Decoction

Decoctions are used with the more tenacious parts of the plant, such as roots, barks, twigs, and some seeds or nuts. These plant parts generally require higher heat and a longer cooking period to release their active constituents. Using the same proportions as for infusions (see above), place the herbs in cold water, cover tightly, bring to a low simmer, and let simmer for 30 to 45 minutes. For a stronger decoction, simmer for 30 to 45 minutes, and then let the herbs steep overnight.

Method III: Solar and Lunar Infusions

The sun is associated with masculine or "yang" energy and can bring warmth, cheer, and outward energy and radiance. The moon is associated with feminine or "yin" energy and can enhance dreams, visions, intuition, and the receptive part of

ourselves. Never underestimate the powers of these great luminaries; they affect us every day. Why not use that power to impact your tea?

To make solar tea, place 1 or 2 ounces of herb in 1 quart of water in a large wide-mouth jar with a tight-fitting lid. Put on the lid, place the jar in a spot that gets direct sunlight, and leave exposed to the sun for several hours. If you wish a particularly potent tea, prepare it first as a standard infusion or decoction, and then offer the tea to the sun to work its magic.

To make lunar tea, place 1 or 2 ounces of herb in 1 quart of water in a large jar or glass bowl. Place directly in the path of the moonlight. It's not necessary to place a lid on the container, though if there happen to be insects in the area, it's wise to cover it with a cotton cloth. Leave overnight, then strain and drink first thing in the morning. If you wish a particularly potent tea, prepare it first as a standard infusion or decoction, and then place the tea in the moonlight.

Capsules

Herbal capsules are among the most popular ways to ingest herbs. They're quick and easy to take, as well as being virtually tasteless. Be sure that the capsules you use are vegetable based; they generally are of much higher quality than gelatin capsules made from animal sources, and they also dissolve quickly and are easy to digest.

The powdered herb in a capsule should be fresh. Open a capsule to test for quality. Does the powdered herb taste and smell potent? Does it retain some of its color? If not, it may not be effective.

There are many excellent ready-made herbal capsules on the market, but it's best to know your sources (see the resources at the end of this book for a list of reputable suppliers). You can also easily make your own capsules. It is a bit time consuming, but it's also a nice meditative process. You open the empty capsules, pack powdered herbs in each half, and join the halves together. You can also find inexpensive hand "machines" that quicken the task.

Powders

Powders are one of the easiest ways to take herbs and can be used in far more creative ways than capsules. Powdered herbs can be blended together and then added to food, blender shakes, and drinks. I especially like herbal powders added to soups and sprinkled in stir-fries. They can also be mixed into honey to form a thick paste, which can be spread on toast and crackers, stirred into hot water, or, depending on the herbs, licked from the spoon (for instance, try cinnamon/ginger/licorice honey — yum). Powders can also be combined with dried fruits, honey, and carob powder to make candy balls, a favorite herbal remedy for the young and old alike. Be sure to purchase only good-quality herbal powders from reputable suppliers, or grind your own. Most home

grinders don't mill the herbs finely enough to make a powder, so it's often better to buy herbs already powdered.

Tinctures

Tinctures are concentrated liquid extracts of herbs. Once prepared, tinctures are easy to take. Simply dilute the desired amount (usually a few drops) in a small amount of water, tea, or juice. Most tinctures are made with alcohol (80 to 100 proof) as the solvent. Alcohol is an excellent solvent and generally extracts most of the active constituents of herbs. However, some people prefer not to use alcohol due to health or religious reasons. Though they won't be as strong or effective as alcohol-based preparations, tinctures made with vegetable glycerin or apple cider vinegar as the solvent are suitable for those who don't tolerate, or prefer not to use, alcohol.

Most herbs tinctured in alcohol retain their properties for years. Vinegar and glycerin tinctures have a shorter shelf life but should last for at least a year or two, and possibly much longer. Tinctures are best stored in a cool, dark location.

There are several methods used to make tinctures. The traditional or simpler's method is the one I prefer. It is an extremely simple system that produces beautiful tinctures every time. All you need are the herbs, the solvent, and a jar with a tight-fitting lid.

Step 1. Chop your herbs finely. When possible, use fresh herbs. But high-quality dried herbs work well, and sometimes they

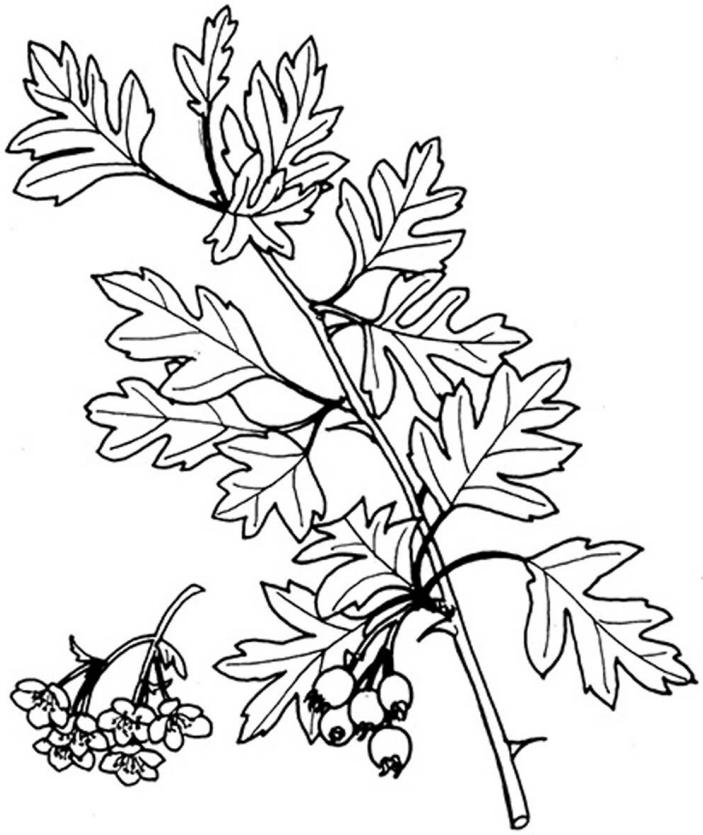
make an even stronger tincture due to the concentration of the dried herb (which is the fresh herb minus its water content).

Step 2. Place the herbs in a clean, wide-mouth canning jar. Pour the solvent over the herbs. If you're using alcohol as the solvent, select one that is 80 to 100 proof, such as vodka, gin, or brandy. If you're using vegetable glycerin, dilute it with ¼ to ½ part water. If you're using vinegar, warm it before pouring it over the herbs to help facilitate the release of herbal constituents. *Completely cover* the herbs with the solvent and then add an additional 2 to 3 inches of the liquid. (If the herbs swell above the solvent, which they sometimes do in the first day or two, then add more solvent. Keep the herbs covered by 2 to 3 inches of liquid.) Cover with a tight-fitting lid.

Step 3. Place the jar in a warm place and let the herbs and liquid soak (macerate) for 4 to 6 weeks — the longer the better. I recommend shaking the bottles daily during the maceration period. This not only prevents the herbs from packing down on the bottom of the jar but also is an invitation for some of the old magic to come back into medicine making. Empower your herbal remedies with prayer, song, or intention while you shake them.

Step 4. Strain the herbs from the solvent by pouring the mixture through a large stainless-steel strainer lined with cheesecloth or muslin. Reserve the liquid, which is now a potent tincture, and compost the herbs. Rebottle and be sure to label or you'll quickly forget what's in that jar! Include the name of the herb, the solvent used (alcohol, vinegar, or glycerin and the percentage), and the date.

This is a very rudimentary lesson on making basic herbal preparations to support and treat the nervous system. There are so many good books and Internet resources that can guide you in the wonderful art of creating your own herbal medicines. Most people are delighted and amazed when they discover how simple and easy it is to make high-quality herbal remedies. But as stated earlier, if making herbal remedies turns out *not* to be your cup of tea, check the resources on the following pages for a list of companies that can provide these products for you.



ABOVE: *Hawthorn*

Recommended Reading

Herbs have such multifaceted personalities that no one book can provide all there is to know about a plant. My suggestion is to select at least three good titles on the subject, more if possible, and keep these handy for referencing each herb when you're first introduced to it. Just like it's wise to use more than one expert for advice, it is important to glean information from more than one book when learning about herbs. Following are a list of a few of my favorite herbal reference books for beginners:

Chevallier, Andrew. *The Encyclopedia of Medicinal Plants*, 2nd ed. DK Publishing, 2000.

Gladstar, Rosemary. *Rosemary Gladstar's Herbal Recipes for Vibrant Health.* Storey, 2008.

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Keville, Kathi. *The Illustrated Herb Encyclopedia.* Mallard Press, 1991.

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Masé, Guido. *The Wild Medicine Solution*. Healing Arts Press, 2013.

Montgomery, Pam. *Plant Spirit Healing.* Bear & Co., 2008.

PallasDowney, Rhonda M. *The Complete Book of Flower Essences*. New World Library, 2002.

Phillips, Nancy, and Michael Phillips. *The Herbalist's Way,* rev ed. Chelsea Green, 2005.

Winston, David, and Steven Maimes. *Adaptogens: Herbs for Strength, Stamina, and Stress Relief.* Healing Arts Press, 2007.

Wood, Matthew. *The Book of Herbal Wisdom*. North Atlantic Books, 1998.

Resources

Where to Find Herbs

I generally suggest purchasing herbal products from local sources, as it helps support bioregional herbalism and community-based herbalists. However, if you need to search further afield, here are some of my favorite sources for high-quality herbs and herbal products.

Avena Botanicals

207-594-0694

www.avenabotanicals.com

Empowered Herbals

360-301-3130

www.empoweredherbals.com

Home of Rachel Jean's Ultimate Green Drink

Frontier Natural Products Co-op

800-669-3275

www.frontiercoop.com

Healing Spirits Herb Farm and Education Center

607-566-2701

www.healingspiritsherbfarm.com

Herb Pharm LLC

800-348-4372

www.herb-pharm.com

Jean's Greens Herbal Tea Works & Herbal Essentials

518-479-0471

www.jeansgreens.com

Mountain Rose Herbs

800-879-3337

www.mountainroseherbs.com

Pacific Botanicals

541-479-7777

www.pacificbotanicals.com

Wild Weeds

707-839-4101

www.wildweeds.com

Woodland Essence

315-845-1515

www.woodlandessence.com

Zack Woods Herb Farm

802-888-7278

www.zackwoodsherbs.com

Educational Resources

American Herb Association

http://ahaherb.com

American Herbalists Guild

617-520-4372

www.americanherbalistguild.com

The only national organization for professional, peer-reviewed herbal practitioners; offers a directory of members.

California School of Herbal Studies

707-887-7457

www.cshs.com

One of the oldest herb schools in the United States, founded by Rosemary Gladstar in 1978.

Herb Research Foundation

www.herbs.org/herbnews

A clearinghouse of herb information; publishes an excellent newsletter.

Sage Mountain Retreat Center & Botanical Sanctuary

802-479-9825

www.sagemountain.com

Apprenticeships and classes with Rosemary Gladstar and other well-known herbalists, as well as a home-study course.

United Plant Savers

740-742-3455

www.unitedplantsavers.org

A nonprofit organization dedicated to the conservation and cultivation of endangered North American medicinal plants. Provides conferences, journals, and other educational services to members.

Other Books by Rosemary Gladstar

Rosemary Gladstar's Herbal Recipes for Vibrant Health

A practical compendium of herbal lore and know-how for wellness, longevity, and boundless energy.

408 PAGES. AVAILABLE IN PAPERBACK.

Rosemary Gladstar's Herbal Remedies for Children's Health

How to use herbs such as chamomile, lemon balm, and echinacea to create gentle baby care products and safe treatments for childhood illnesses.

80 PAGES. AVAILABLE IN PAPERBACK.

Rosemary Gladstar's Medicinal Herbs: A Beginner's Guide

How to grow, harvest, prepare, and use 33 of the most common and versatile healing plants.

224 PAGES. AVAILABLE IN PAPERBACK.

Other Storey Titles You Will Enjoy

The Beginner's Guide to Edible Herbs
Charles W. G. Smith

Grow, preserve, and cook with 26 popular kitchen herbs.

152 PAGES. AVAILABLE IN PAPERBACK.

READ MORE AT GOODREADS

Herbal Remedy Gardens
Dorie Byers

More than 35 illustrated plans for easy-to-maintain container and backyard herbal gardens.

224 PAGES. AVAILABLE IN PAPERBACK.

READ MORE AT GOODREADS

Homegrown Herbs
Tammi Hartung

A complete guide to growing, using, and enjoying more than 100 herbs.

256 PAGES. AVAILABLE IN PAPERBACK.

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